



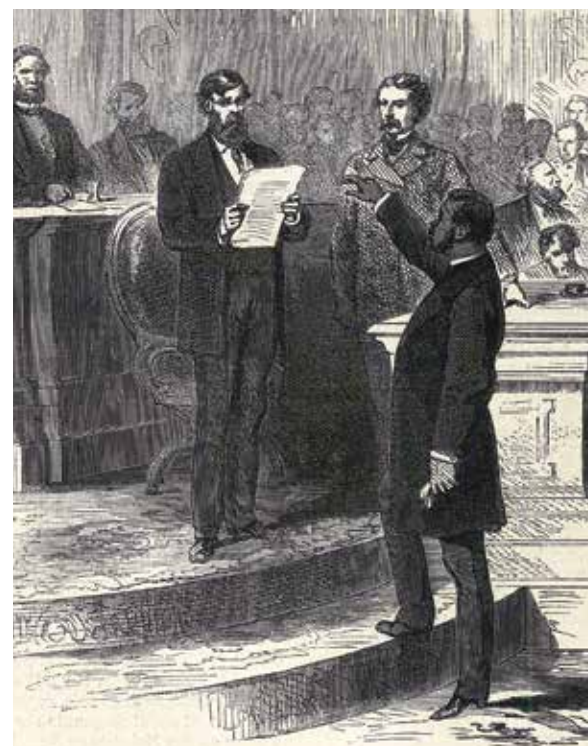
SCENES

PEOPLE, PLACES, AND EVENTS
THAT SHAPED THE UNITED STATES SENATE

By
Betty K. Koed

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UNITED STATES SENATE



On March 4, 1789, eight newly elected senators gathered in a small chamber in New York City's Federal Hall. They hoped to put into action a plan for a new federal government that had been established by the framers of the United States Constitution two years earlier. Unfortunately, they needed 12 senators to reach a quorum and start business. It took another month to achieve that quorum.

On a warm morning in 1918, senators awaited the arrival of Colorado senator Charles Thomas. His appearance in the Senate Chamber would signify an important development—the change of season from winter to spring. If Senator Thomas appeared without his toupee, senators knew it was time to put away their overcoats and pull out their spring suits.

On June 10, 1964, the Senate Chamber was filled to capacity. The visitors' galleries were packed with spectators, and reporters occupied the press gallery. Members of the House of Representatives and other government officials squeezed into standing-room-only space at the back of the Chamber. At 10:00 a.m., the presiding officer called the Chamber to order and senators took their seats. The time had come to end a long filibuster against a monumental civil rights bill, but no one—not even Senate leaders—knew if the necessary 67 senators would vote to invoke cloture, end the debate, and bring this historic bill to passage.

The history of the United States Senate is full of dramatic moments, famous senators, and nation-changing events, but it is also peppered with colorful characters and humorous incidents that have become part of the lore of an institution now more than 230 years old. This volume presents a collection of 150 scenes from Senate history. Varied in length and wide-ranging in topic, each scene represents a part of a much larger story.

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Betty K. Koed, *Senate Historian*

Prepared under the direction of
Sonceria Ann Berry, *Secretary of the Senate*

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PREFACE

Senate history is full of great stories. Some are tragic, others are comical or poignant, but they are always informative and often entertaining. To date, nearly 2,000 individuals have served as U.S. senators since 1789, and thousands more have influenced the Senate as officers, staff members, reporters, lobbyists, activists, and even visitors. Uncovering the stories of those individuals as well as the long and important history of this complex institution has been the work of Senate historians since 1975, when the Senate Historical Office was established. It has been my privilege to be one of those historians for nearly a quarter of a century.

Since 1997 Senate historians have presented brief talks to senators at their caucus luncheons, a task that I assumed in 2009. Since that time, I have prepared and presented hundreds of these historical vignettes on subjects covering the breadth of Senate history. I have selected 150 of those stories for inclusion in this volume. Although they vary in length and are wide-ranging in topic, each entry is designed to tell a unique tale. This volume is not a comprehensive history of the U.S. Senate; rather, it is a collection of individual scenes, each one representing a part of a much larger story.

I have been blessed with gifted and generous colleagues since joining the Senate Historical

Office in 1998, including my predecessors as Senate historian, Richard Baker and Donald Ritchie. My colleagues Katherine Scott, Daniel Holt, and Mary Baumann have contributed to this volume in multiple ways, often suggesting topics and reviewing drafts. Senate archivists Karen Paul, Alison White, and Elisabeth Seelinger have assisted me as I researched the vast collection of archived Senate records. Our executive assistant Amy Camilleri has kept the office running smoothly, giving me the time to research and write. Senate librarians, particularly chief reference librarian Tamara Elliott, located government documents, published and unpublished, to answer my questions and solve historical mysteries. I am particularly grateful to our historical editor Beth Hahn and our photo historian Heather Moore. Their attention to detail, keen eye for design, and endless supply of useful suggestions made this publication possible. Secretary of the Senate Sonceria Ann Berry, as well as former Secretary Julie E. Adams, has provided unyielding support to this and so many Historical Office projects. Finally, I wish to thank the many senators who have attentively listened to my presentations, asked insightful questions, and encouraged me to produce this book.

Betty K. Koed
Senate Historian
August 2022

CHAPTER 1

Origins, Evolution, and Traditions



The Great Compromise of 1787

“So great is the unanimity, we hear, that prevails in the [constitutional] Convention,” reported the *Pennsylvania Packet* on July 19, 1787, “that it has been proposed to call the room in which they assemble—Unanimity Hall.” That may have been the public perception, but in reality, the closed-door sessions of the “Great Convention” were contentious and divisive. In fact, one of the most important agreements, the decision known as the Great Compromise, nearly failed.¹

Delegates from 11 states had gathered in Philadelphia in late May 1787 (Rhode Island did not participate and New Hampshire’s delegates arrived later), first to revise the Articles of Confederation and then to frame a new Constitution to establish a federal government. The convention quickly divided into opposing factions over the issue of representation, with delegates from small states battling those from large states. On June 11, 1787, Roger Sherman of Connecticut called for a compromise. He proposed giving states an equal voice in the Senate and proportional representation in the House. Delegates from large states objected, arguing that their greater population and financial contributions deserved a proportionately larger voice, but small-state delegates held firm. “I do not, gentlemen, trust you,” Gunning Bedford of Delaware retorted. “If you possess the power, the abuse of it could not be checked; and what then would prevent you from exercising it to our destruction?” Sherman’s compromise proposal failed.²

Two weeks later, by a slim majority vote, the convention established proportional representation for the House. Angry men from small states threatened to walk out. Another Connecticut delegate, Oliver Ellsworth, proposed a second compromise, nearly



Oliver Ellsworth, left, and Roger Sherman. *The Connecticut Compromise*, by Bradley Stevens, 2006. U.S. Senate Collection.

identical to Sherman’s plan. The large-state delegates objected. Again, the compromise failed. As debate continued, small-state delegates stood their ground for equality in the Senate. The result? Stalemate!³

In desperation, the convention created a “grand committee,” consisting of one delegate from each state, to seek a solution. Another week passed before Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts reported that the committee had reluctantly approved the plan presented by Sherman and Ellsworth, which became known as the Connecticut Compromise, with its dual system of representation. The convention’s weary delegates debated the committee’s recommendation for another 11 days. “I *almost* despair of seeing a favourable issue to the proceedings of our Convention,” complained George Washington to Alexander Hamilton on July 10, 1787, “and do therefore repent having had any agency in the business.”⁴

Finally, on July 16, the convention voted. Five states supported the compromise: Connecticut, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and North Carolina. Four states

opposed: Pennsylvania, Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia. By chance, the New York delegation was absent and therefore cast no vote. The Massachusetts delegation was divided and could not vote. Almost by default, therefore, the small states assured their equality in the Senate—by just a single vote.

Unanimity Hall? Hardly. The Great Compromise of 1787 was achieved through combative debate,

painful concessions—and a twist of fate. No one was completely satisfied, but nearly everyone agreed that it was better than a failed convention. Although passed by the slimmest of margins, the Great Compromise remains a bedrock of our federal system. Equal representation in the Senate, secured by the Great Compromise, helped to preserve the power of the individual states.

The Teacup and Saucer Story

There is an old story, often repeated, that describes the “cooling factor” associated with the United States Senate. The most commonly heard version of the story goes like this:

It is said that upon his return from diplomatic service in France, and after the framers approved the Constitution, Thomas Jefferson questioned George Washington on the wisdom of creating a bicameral congress.

“Of what use is a Senate?” Jefferson inquired. As he asked the question, Jefferson poured tea from his cup into the saucer, swirled it around, and then poured it back into the cup.

“You have answered your own question,” Washington observed.

“How so?” asked Jefferson.

“Why did you pour that tea into the saucer?”

“To cool it.”

“Just so,” Washington replied, “the Senate is the saucer into which we pour legislation to cool.”

This intriguing story can be a useful metaphor when explaining the Senate’s deliberative nature, but is it true? Did such a conversation ever take place? Unfortunately, neither Jefferson nor Washington documented such an event. Historians have failed to find



George Washington, by Gilbert Stuart, ca. 1796–1805.
U.S. Senate Collection.

a contemporary account of the conversation, but we have discovered competing versions.

The earliest known variation on this theme appeared in a letter written by constitutional law professor Francis Lieber to Ohio representative and

later president James Garfield. Dated December 11, 1871, the letter was first published in American newspapers in 1878. In the letter, Lieber described how a student recounted a story told by French legal scholar Edouard de Laboulaye describing Jefferson's disagreement with Washington over the need for a bicameral legislature. "You, yourself, have proved the excellence of two houses," said Washington in this version of the story. "You have turned your hot tea from the cup into the saucer, to get it cool. It is the same thing we desire of the two houses." A similar version appeared in an 1884 article by Thomas Higginson in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. "We pour our legislation into the Senatorial saucer to cool it," Washington said in Higginson's description of the event.⁵

In 1888 the story caught the attention of historian Moncure D. Conway, but he changed the beverage. "Why did you pour that coffee into the saucer?" asked Washington in Conway's rendition. A 1907 adaptation printed in the *Washington Post* named Abraham Lincoln, not Washington, as the employer of the handy

metaphor. When a frustrated aide to Lincoln asked, "What is the use of the Senate?" Lincoln "in his homely fashion . . . poured the tea . . . to the saucer and back again." According to the *Washington Post*, "A great light broke" upon Lincoln's assistant. "You mean it enables public passion to cool off," he declared. Lincoln nodded and drank his tea. A 1925 storyteller described a female dinner companion asking Washington that persistent question, "Of what use is the Senate?"⁶

True story? Apocryphal? We probably will never know. The story endures because it is useful. We strive to understand the Senate and its unique attributes. We must explain the Senate's role in our constitutional system of checks and balances. We need to demonstrate how the Senate can serve as a place for second thoughts in the legislative process. We are called upon to justify Senate actions when they frustrate impatient presidents, infuriate Speakers of the House, and even mystify Senate colleagues. When in need, call on George Washington, because more than two centuries after that alleged conversation, the Senate is still cooling the tea.

Election of Senators

On September 17, 1787, 39 of the Constitutional Convention's 55 delegates signed the Constitution. Nearly four months had passed since those delegates had arrived in Philadelphia. On that day, they gave their approval to a new form of government, the core of which was a bicameral congress. During deliberations, the framers had readily agreed that representatives would be elected by popular vote, but more controversial was the decision on how senators would be chosen.

James Madison's Virginia Plan, which provided a basic outline for the Constitution, proposed

that senators be elected by the House of Representatives. Madison's colleagues objected. Such a scheme would compromise the Senate's independence and—even worse—make it subservient to the House. One delegate, James Wilson of Pennsylvania, suggested (rather boldly) that senators be elected by the people, but no one took that suggestion seriously. Instead, the delegates sought a method of election that would shield the Senate from the "fury of democracy." Alexander Hamilton even went so far as to suggest that senators should serve for life—with no pay.⁷

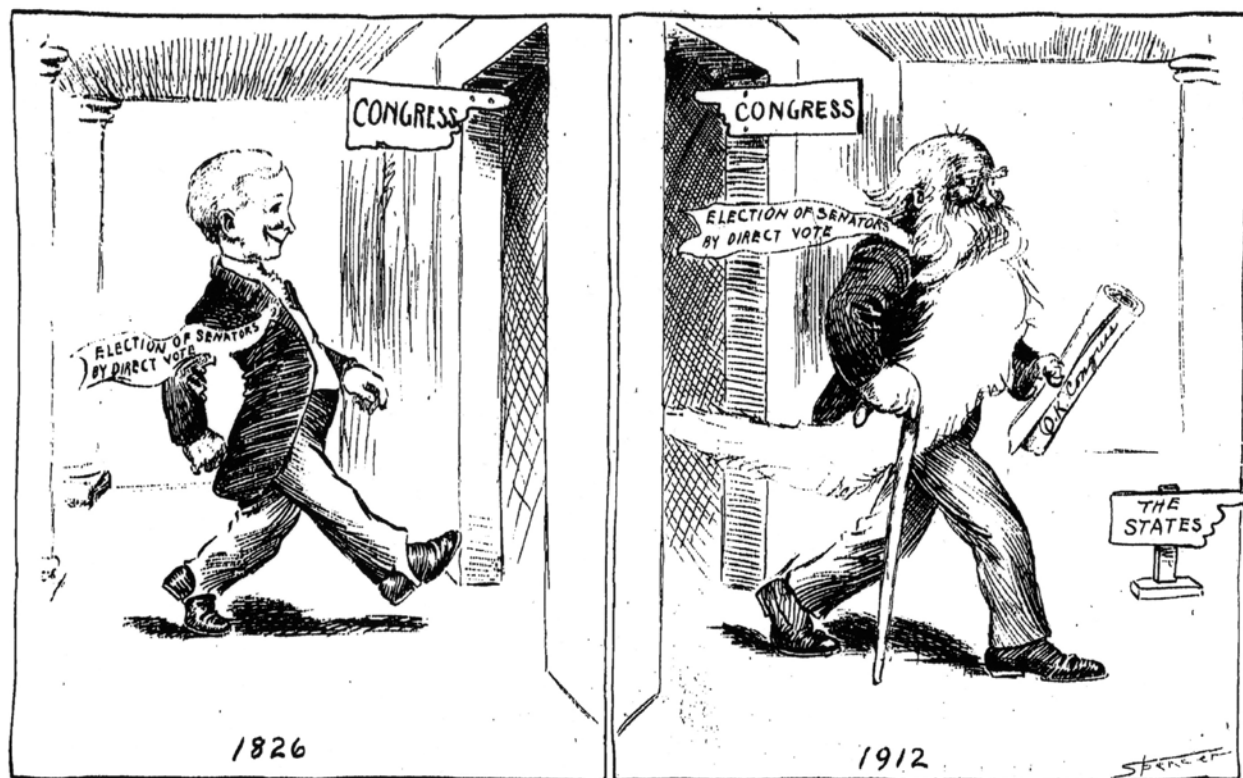
Finally, John Dickinson of Delaware offered a compromise. He proposed a system in which senators would be elected by state legislatures—which were first elected by the people. This system of indirect election, he explained, acknowledged that the “sense of the states would be better collected through their governments” rather than “immediately from the people at large.” He also argued that the legislatures would be more likely to choose senators “distinguished for their rank in life” rather than by mere popular appeal. Consequently, Article I, section 3 of the Constitution declared: The Senate “shall be composed of two Senators from each state, chosen by the legislature thereof.”⁸

By allowing state legislatures to elect senators, the framers and their allies sought to strengthen the bond between state and federal government, while insulating senators from the pressure of public opinion. They also hoped to improve the Constitution’s chances for ratification by state conventions by emphasizing this

“convenient link” and arguing that senators would serve as “ambassadors of their states.” And yet, the pragmatic framers also protected senatorial independence. Senators’ salaries would be paid by the federal treasury, for example, and states would have no means to recall senators.⁹

This system of senatorial elections lasted for nearly 125 years—electing men such as Henry Clay, Charles Sumner, and Henry Cabot Lodge—but the framers’ plan for indirect election encountered many problems. By the mid-19th century, partisan battles began causing deadlocks in state legislatures, resulting in long Senate vacancies. Even more troubling, elections became tarnished by intimidation and bribery, as state officials yielded to monetary temptation when choosing senators. Calls for reform of the indirect election process appeared as early as 1826 and continued for decades.¹⁰

By the 1890s, the most persistent calls for reform came from state legislators who wished to be free of a



“At Last!” by Spencer, *Omaha World Herald*, May 5, 1912, depicting the long fight for direct election of senators. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

system marred by corruption. Frustrated with a lack of progress at the national level, state reformers pioneered new methods of electing senators. The Oregon Plan became the principal model, whereby voters chose senators in primary elections, then required state legislators to take a pledge to support the popularly elected candidate. Needless to say, legislators who chose not to pledge support for the people's choice soon found themselves out of office. By 1911 more than 30 states had adopted some form of direct election of U.S. senators.

For the most part, senators opposed reform efforts. Such proposals routinely died in committee until Kansas senator Joseph Bristow made direct election his personal crusade. In January of 1911, Bristow proposed a constitutional amendment to modify Article I, section 3, to read that the Senate "shall be composed of two Senators from each State, elected by the people thereof." With the help of William Borah of Idaho, Bristow skillfully maneuvered the resolution out of committee and onto the Senate floor, where the debate took a disturbing but predictable turn.

Opponents of direct election looked for a way to derail reform efforts. They got that chance when a number of southern senators demanded removal of section 4 of Article I of the Constitution, which allowed Congress to regulate the time and manner of elections. Seeking ways to maintain and enforce racial segregation in their states, the southerners wanted to ensure noninterference with Jim Crow election laws, but the larger group of opponents seized on the issue as a way to sabotage Bristow's resolution. The bitter debate that followed had little to do with federalism or electing senators, but had everything to do with America's racial dilemma. The result was a stalemate that lasted until the 61st Congress ended and Bristow's resolution expired.

When the 62nd Congress convened in 1911, Bristow again introduced his resolution—with section 4 of Article I intact. This time, however, Bristow was backed by a large freshman class of senators, many of whom owed



Senator Joseph Bristow. Library of Congress.

their recent victories to state-level popular elections. On June 12, 1911, the Senate approved Bristow's resolution. The debate over section 4 continued in conference with the House, but the momentum for reform was too strong. On May 13, 1912, the House concurred and direct election was approved. The Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified on April 8, 1913.

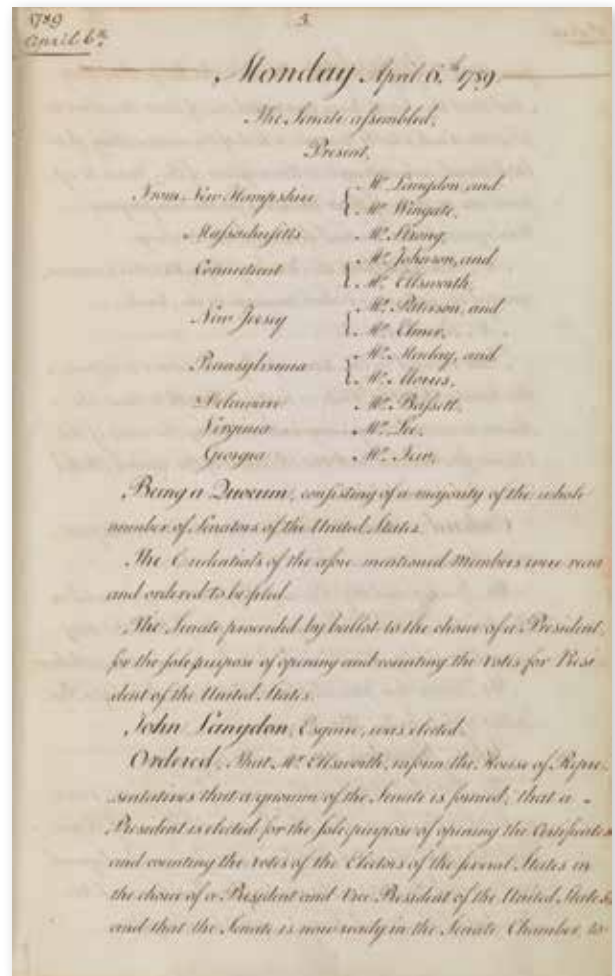
The result was not a revolution, but it certainly brought change. In the 1914 general election, every incumbent senator seeking reelection won, but in 1916 that success rate fell to 55 percent, and it remained mostly below 70 percent for several decades. This changed the Senate in ways that appeared subtle to some, but to others it was evidence of a Senate in evolution. No longer were senators merely the dutiful envoys of their state, suggested journalist George Rothwell Brown in his 1922 book, *The Leadership of Congress*, nor were they the tools of a state party machine; rather, senators had become independent political actors who directly represented the people.¹¹

The Long Journey to Quorum

When the necessary ninth state—New Hampshire—ratified the Constitution on June 21, 1788, the Congress under the Articles of Confederation began the transition to the new federal government. On September 13, that soon-to-expire Congress issued an ordinance giving states authority to elect their first senators and set the convening date for the First Federal Congress—March 4, 1789. As it turned out, that was the easy part.¹²

Eleven states had ratified the Constitution by March 4 (North Carolina and Rhode Island were the holdouts); therefore, 22 senators were expected at the temporary seat of government housed in New York City’s Federal Hall. Twelve senators were required to establish a quorum. Eight senators showed up. This punctual “gang of eight” included New Hampshire’s John Langdon, soon to become the Senate’s first president pro tempore. Connecticut sent Oliver Ellsworth, who had been instrumental in breaking the deadlock over the issue of representation at the Constitutional Convention. Caleb Strong arrived from Massachusetts, and William Few represented Georgia. Pennsylvania’s William Maclay proceeded to keep a detailed diary of the Senate’s first session, a valuable resource for historians. They were joined by Paine Wingate of New Hampshire, William Johnson of Connecticut, and Robert Morris of Pennsylvania. All of them had served in their state legislature or the Continental Congress. Six were framers of the Constitution. They were a truly distinguished group of men, but there were not enough of them to make a quorum.¹³

Day after day, these eight senators appeared in the Senate Chamber only to be disappointed. After a week, they sent letters to their missing colleagues:



Senate Journal, April 6, 1789, the date a quorum was finally reached in the Senate. Records of the U.S. Senate, National Archives.

“We apprehend that no arguments are necessary to evince to you the indispensable necessity of putting the Government into immediate operation.” Another week passed, and another, and still no quorum. “We earnestly request your immediate attendance,” they pleaded on March 18. When William Paterson of New Jersey appeared on the 19th, they grew hopeful. Richard Bassett arrived from Delaware on March 21 and Jonathan Elmer from New Jersey on the 28th. Progress! But still one man short of a quorum!¹⁴

Why did it take so long to reach a quorum? Rather than condemning the tardy senators, we should consider the historical context. Members of Congress in 1789 enjoyed little protection against illness or injury, and they particularly suffered from the hazards of wintertime travel. The short hop from Boston to New York City typically took six days. During the winter, even that journey could occupy two weeks or more. Senators navigated treacherous roads in wagons or sleighs and often were forced to seek refuge at nearby farms when conditions grew too dangerous. “There was no possibility of conveying [us] in February to new-york, by water or on wheels,” complained one

member of Congress. Senators from Maryland or Virginia endured weeks on horseback or in rickety coaches, braving cold and icy waters at five separate ferry crossings. Southerners, traveling mostly by water, faced the greatest hazards of all. One southern member was delayed for weeks when his ship foundered off the Delaware coast.¹⁵

Knowing of such perils, we might marvel at how many senators did arrive, and certainly we can commend Richard Henry Lee of Virginia. Despite the arduous travel conditions, Lee made it to Federal Hall to bring the Senate’s number to an even dozen. On April 6, 1789, the Senate achieved its first quorum.¹⁶

The Oath of Office

On May 5, 1789, the Senate passed its first bill, the Oath Act. The Constitution specified an oath of office for the president, but it left to the First Federal Congress the task of devising an oath for members of Congress and other government officials. Soon after the House and Senate established a quorum in April of 1789, the new members debated and passed a simple oath: “I do solemnly swear or affirm that I will support the Constitution of the United States.”¹⁷

To our modern ears, that oath sounds incomplete. Missing are the rhetorical flourishes in today’s oath: to bear “true faith and allegiance;” to take “this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion;” and to “well and faithfully” discharge the duties of the office. For three-quarters of a century, however, the simple statement of support for the Constitution was sufficient. Then came the Civil War.

The outbreak of war in 1861 and the growing concern over loyalty to the Union transformed

the routine practice of oath-taking into an act of enormous significance. In April of 1861, President Abraham Lincoln ordered all civilian employees within the executive branch to take an expanded oath. When Congress convened an emergency session in July, it echoed the president’s action, requiring all government employees to take an oath to support the Union.¹⁸

By the time Congress returned for its regular session in December of 1861, members feared Northern traitors as much as Southern soldiers. Again, they revised the oath, adding a new section known as the “Ironclad Test Oath.” This crisis-inspired language, signed into law on July 2, 1862, required “every person elected or appointed to any office . . . under the government of the United States” to swear that they had not previously engaged in criminal or disloyal conduct. “I have given no aid, countenance, counsel or encouragement to persons engaged in armed hostility,” stated the oath. “I have never voluntarily borne arms against the United States.”¹⁹

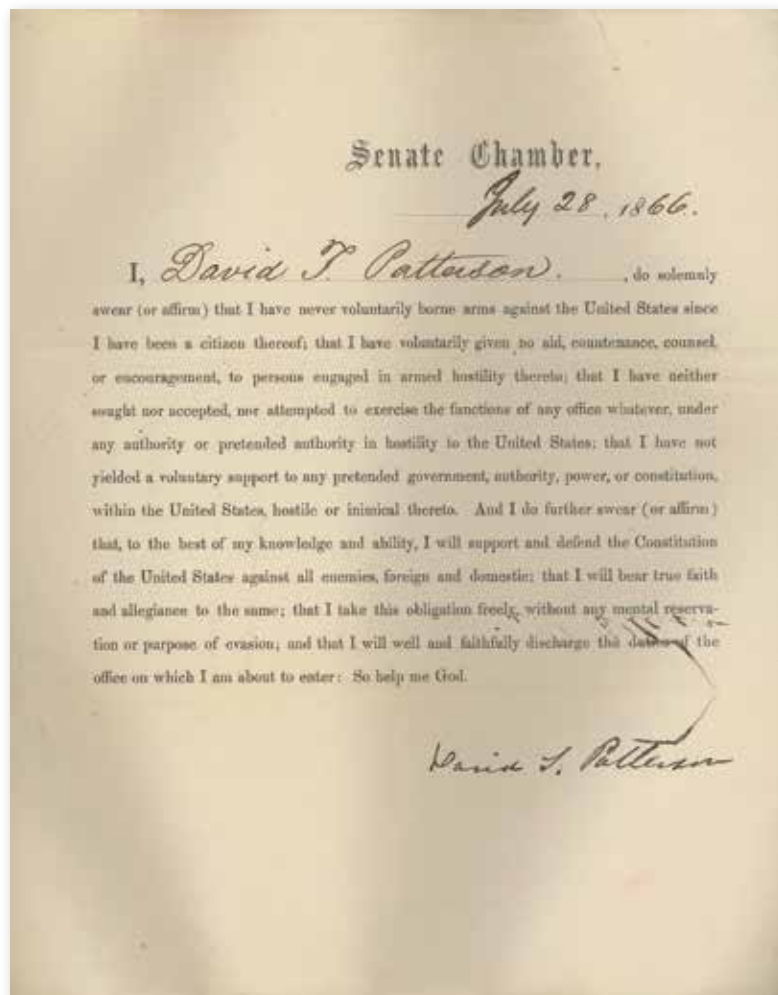
Despite the language of the law directing “every person elected or appointed” to take the oath, Congress exempted itself from this oath-taking requirement, but senators and representatives were encouraged by their colleagues to take the oath voluntarily. By late 1863, almost every senator, Republican or Democrat, had done so, but in December of that year Delaware senator James Bayard, Jr., refused. This ignited a renewed debate in the Senate over the necessity and the constitutionality of a loyalty oath for members of Congress.

Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner championed the idea of making the oath mandatory for all members of Congress. On January 25, 1864, the Senate voted 28 to 11 to adopt the mandatory oath. Each senator was now required to declare his absolute loyalty to the Union in addition to swearing allegiance to the Constitution. And, for the first time, senators were required to sign the oath in a specially bound book, a practice that continues to this day. On January 26, 1864, the Ironclad Test Oath was administered to James Bayard who dutifully took the oath, knowing it would be his last Senate action. He promptly resigned from the Senate.²⁰

After the war, as tensions cooled, Congress passed new legislation to allow some former Confederates to take an alternative oath. For years, Northerners complained of a double standard that required loyal Unionists to take the Ironclad Oath but permitted ex-Confederates to ignore it. Finally, in 1884, Congress quietly deleted the stricter

language of the Ironclad Oath, leaving intact today’s moving affirmation of constitutional allegiance—an oath forged in crisis but tempered by peace.²¹

I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter: So help me God.



Oath of Office of Tennessee senator David Patterson, July 28, 1866 (Ironclad Oath). Senate Oath Book (1866–1883), Records of the U.S. Senate, National Archives.

Jefferson's Manual

Vice President Thomas Jefferson took formal leave of the Senate on February 28, 1801, shortly after being elected president. In his farewell remarks, Jefferson assured the senators that their “habits of order and decorum” had rendered his position as president of the Senate “an office of little difficulty.” He was being generous.²²

Jefferson understood that legislative issues, by nature, were contentious. As presiding officer, therefore, he sought to create an atmosphere where senators could debate controversial matters peacefully and respectfully. Senate rules adopted in 1789 included only a few provisions to promote orderly debate. Members could not talk while a senator addressed the Chamber, for example, nor could they read newspapers while another senator spoke. Senators had to stand in their place when addressing the presiding officer, and then, when finished, sit down. The interpretation of such rules was left to the vice president, who had the power to decide issues of order.

When Jefferson became vice president in 1797, he was aware that his predecessor, John Adams, had been criticized for erratic or conflicting rulings. In addition, although schooled in parliamentary law, Jefferson’s procedural knowledge was outdated, and so he began an intense study of parliamentary practice. For four years the vice president carefully examined the rules of the British Parliament and other legislative bodies. By the time his vice-presidential term ended in 1801, he had completed *A Manual of Parliamentary Practice, for the Use of the Senate of the United States*—now known simply as *Jefferson’s Manual*. It was the first rules of order ever published in the United States.

The Senate did not adopt Jefferson’s *Manual* as its official rule book, but its guidelines still influence



Thomas Jefferson, by Moses Jacob Ezekiel, part of the Vice Presidential Bust Collection. U.S. Senate Collection.

senatorial behavior. For example, when a senator refers to the distinguished junior or senior senator from a state, that senator is carrying out Jefferson’s instruction that no senator should address another senator by name. Senators can object in strong terms to a measure being proposed, Jefferson noted, but cannot question the motives of those who propose it. In debate, he wrote, no one is “to speak impertinently or beside the question, superfluously or tediously.” He even decreed that no senator should enter the Chamber wearing a hat, the first hint of a Senate dress code.²³

For more than two centuries now, Jefferson’s *Manual* has set a tone for Senate debate. “I have begun a sketch,” he wrote, “which those who come

after me will successively correct and fill up.” Some of his dictates have found their way into Senate rules, and through the years—as Jefferson predicted—other regulations have appeared to enforce proper decorum, such as prohibiting flowers in the Chamber. In the 19th century, bouquets of flowers were placed on each desk at the beginning of a new Congress, sparking such a competition among members that it became

difficult to see the senators behind the flowers. More recently, concerns about decorum have limited the use of electronic equipment in the Chamber. Such regulations are consistent with the spirit of Jefferson’s Manual. In order to conduct the nation’s vital legislative business, Jefferson reasoned, it is imperative “that order, decency, and regularity be preserved in a dignified public body” such as the Senate.²⁴

A Senatorial Salary

When delegates to the Constitutional Convention met in 1787, one of the thorny issues they discussed was compensation—how much members of Congress should be paid. That issue proved to be so troubling that the framers left it undecided. Instead, Article I of the Constitution stated: “Senators and Representatives shall receive a Compensation for their Services, to be ascertained by Law.” In other words, members of the First Federal Congress had to set their own level of compensation.

In 1789 members decided to pay themselves \$6 for each day they attended a session. This per diem rate rose to \$8 in 1817 but often was touted as unrealistic. This “pitiful sum” might “induce a lounging lout to come here,” complained a member in 1816, but it certainly would not attract a gentleman. Some called for a salary sufficient to attract men of talent and to give the poor man a chance to serve, but opponents feared that higher pay would only attract scoundrels. South Carolina’s Benjamin Huger warned that a higher rate of pay would certainly “excite the avarice” of a third-rate lawyer.²⁵

In 1816 Congress boldly passed a new compensation bill, abandoning the \$6 per diem in favor of

an annual salary of \$1,500. Immediately, newspaper editors accused Congress of wanton extravagance. Outraged citizens called for tar and feathers. The aging Thomas Jefferson, safe in retirement, predicted that “the entire mass [of Congress] will go out” with the next election. He was nearly right. A number of senators and two-thirds of the House fell victim to voter outrage. Those who survived did so only by promising to repeal the infamous “fifteen-hundred-dollar law”—and they did, as soon as a new Congress convened. Senators remained on per diem pay for another four decades.²⁶

By the 1850s, Senate employees made better money than senators. The secretary of the Senate received an annual salary of \$3,000 in 1853, and a Senate clerk got \$1,500, but senators still received just \$8 for each day the Senate was in session, which added up to about \$1,400 a year. That amount often fell below a senator’s actual expenses, forcing him to draw upon personal funds. Finally, in 1856, Congress passed another compensation bill establishing a modest annual salary of \$3,000. Even this came conditionally—if a member missed a day of service, his pay was docked.²⁷

For a while, all was calm in the world of congressional pay. Congress quietly raised its salary to \$5,000

in 1865 with nary a hint of protest, but then came the notorious “Salary Grab Law.” Frustrated by a rising cost of living and the continuing concern that politics was a rich man’s game, on March 3, 1873, just one day before the end of the 42nd Congress, members attached a rider to an appropriations bill raising their salary to \$7,500. Pushing their luck, they made the raise retroactive to the beginning of that two-year Congress—in essence giving themselves a sizeable bonus.²⁸

The salary law was denounced as an act of “shameless rapacity” and nothing short of “wholesale plunder.” This “back-salary swindle,” as it came to be known, effectively roused a hostile public. “From the great voice of the people,” noted the *Atlanta Constitution*, “has come one distinct, swelling, unconditional and unbroken note of unstinted censure.” The disheartened senators paid back the bonus, repealed the law, and remained at the lower salary for another three decades—just one of the reasons why, by the turn of the 20th century, the Senate became known as a Millionaire’s Club.²⁹

Senators continue to be paid an annual salary, but modern ethics laws have limited compensation in other ways. For example, they receive no additional compensation for

housing or other expenses and no added pay for service on committees. Outside income is strictly limited, and senators cannot receive honoraria. Just like their 19th-century counterparts, today’s senators must pass a law to raise their salaries—and face a hostile public when they choose to do so.³⁰



“That Salary Grab,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, December 27, 1873. Library of Congress.

The Senate Opens Its Doors

In this era of televised Senate proceedings and constant news coverage of Senate action, we take for granted legislative debates that occur in open session before a public audience. The earliest senators had no such expectations.

In fact, during its first six years of operation, the Senate met almost entirely in secret. Not until the Fourth Congress convened in 1795 did the Senate finally allow the public and the press to observe its proceedings.

Opening Senate sessions to the public was a political decision, not a constitutional mandate. The framers of the Constitution assumed that the Senate would follow their own practice, as well as that of the Continental Congress, and meet behind closed doors. When the House of Representatives immediately opened its proceedings to the public in 1789, senators criticized the representatives, accusing them of pandering to spectators. Most senators insisted that the publication of an official journal was a sufficient means of informing their constituency. A public gallery would be an unnecessary distraction.

It didn't take long, however, for the Senate's closed-door sessions to generate suspicion. The state legislatures, at that time responsible for electing senators, petitioned members to open the Senate to public scrutiny. Without such access, how could they effectively assess their senators' behavior? Mounting distrust of the Senate as a "nest of secret plotters" pressured even the most stubborn senators to rethink the closed-door policy. The opportunity for change arrived in 1794. The majority party Federalists, who strongly supported closed sessions, challenged the credentials of a Democratic Republican senator from Pennsylvania, Albert Gallatin. To avoid accusations



"View of the Senate of the United States in Session," by J. Rodgers/E. Anthony, ca. 1850. U.S. Senate Collection.

of corruption and partisanship that a closed-door session and secret vote might produce, Federalist senators agreed to open the Chamber doors—temporarily. Predictably, once the doors were open, closing them again proved to be politically impossible. Soon, senators voted 19 to 8 to authorize construction of a gallery, and on December 9, 1795, the Senate permanently opened its doors to the public.

Ironically, very few people rushed to the Senate Chamber to watch the daily sessions. Visitors found the Senate to be too reserved, too orderly, or too boring. As historian Roy Swannstrom explained, “The sight and sound of two dozen urbane gentlemen discussing in

courteous, conversational tones the issues of the day” paled in comparison to the more boisterously partisan action in the House. It took another generation for the Senate to capture public attention and to gain center stage on Capitol Hill. By the 1830s, as lawmakers debated the crucial issue of the abolition of slavery, visitors flocked to the Senate Chamber to hear great orators such as Henry Clay and Daniel Webster.

Opening its Chamber doors to the public in 1795 was an important and symbolic step, but what brought the Senate to the forefront of legislative action—and filled the gallery with spectators—was not the mere availability of seats. It was the substance and quality of the debate.³¹

The Acting Vice President

After the impeachment trial of President Andrew Johnson in 1868, *Harper's Weekly* published an image that carried the caption: “Vice-President Wade Administers the Oath.” Vice President Wade? In 1868 Ohio senator Benjamin Wade was the Senate’s president pro tempore, but he never served as vice president. A mystery to be solved! How did President pro tempore Ben Wade become vice president?³²

The Constitution states: “The Vice President of the United States shall be President of the Senate,” and also, the Senate shall choose “a President pro tempore” to preside over the Senate “in the Absence of the Vice President.” The Presidential Succession Act of 1792, the first of three such acts, placed the president pro tempore in the line of presidential succession just behind the vice president, but neither the Constitution nor the succession act provided a means to fill a vice-presidential vacancy. (Not until 1967 was this remedied by the Twenty-fifth Amendment to the

Constitution.) Since 1789 seven vice presidents have died in office, nine have succeeded to the presidency, and two have resigned, leaving the office of vice president empty for significant periods of time.³³

The first vacancy crisis came in 1812 when Vice President George Clinton died in office. Facing a year without a presiding officer, the Senate broke with the tradition of electing a president pro tempore to serve only during short absences. Instead, the Senate elected William Crawford of Georgia to serve a continuing term as president pro tempore, keeping him in place until a new vice president was elected and sworn into office. Crawford was thus heir apparent to the presidency, but no one called him vice president. The Senate did double his pay, however, from the standard \$6 per diem to \$12 for each day the Senate was in session.³⁴

In 1841 President William Henry Harrison died in office, making John Tyler the first vice president to succeed to the presidency. Again, the Senate elected

a president pro tempore—Samuel Southard of New Jersey—to serve a continuing term in the absence of a vice president, putting him directly behind the president for succession. This time the new title appeared in contemporary accounts of debate—“The Vice President, Mr. Southard, took the Chair”—but not everyone approved. One editorial noted that while some spoke of Southard as vice president, “We think this is incorrect.” But the precedent was set. “According to a fair interpretation of the Constitution and the [act of succession],” noted one contemporary, “inasmuch as there exists a total vacancy in the office of Vice President . . . the ‘powers and duties’ of the office devolve upon” the president pro tempore. Congress agreed and in the 1856 compensation law awarded the president pro tempore the vice president’s salary when such a vacancy occurred. By the time Ben Wade took the position in 1867, therefore, the practice of designating the president pro tempore as vice president during a vacancy was well established.³⁵

In 1886 a new law removed the president pro tempore and the Speaker of the House from the line of succession, replacing them with cabinet officials. In 1947 a third succession law brought the president pro tempore back into the line of succession but put the position behind the Speaker of the House. These statutory changes did not alter the custom of treating the president pro tempore as the “acting vice president” during vice-presidential vacancies. In 1923, for example, President pro tempore Albert Cummins received the benefits of the vice presidency, including a fancy new automobile. In 1945 President pro tempore Kenneth McKellar sat in on cabinet meetings. In fact, the last president pro tempore to gain the vice



“Vice-President Wade Administering the Oath to Schuyler Colfax,” *Harper's Weekly*, March 20, 1869. U.S. Senate Collection.

presidential label was Mississippi senator James Eastland. Following the resignation of Spiro Agnew in 1973, Eastland moved into the vice president’s office, answered vice-presidential mail, and for 58 days collected the vice president’s salary. When called, presidents pro tempore have usually embraced this role, but James Eastland found it all rather onerous. When Vice President Gerald R. Ford became president in 1974, Eastland declined to move back to the vice president’s office, noting that he had no intention of applying for the position on a full-time basis.³⁶

The First Unanimous Consent Agreement

Unanimous consent agreements, popularly known as UCs, bring order and structure to floor business and expedite the course of legislation in the Senate. They can be as simple as a request to dispense with a quorum call or as complicated as a binding contract resulting from prolonged and often spirited debate. Senators have been conducting routine business by unanimous consensus since 1789, but the more formal UC agreement dates to the 1840s when Senator William Allen of Ohio sought a method to end debate.

On March 24, 1846, Senator Allen expressed his desire “that there should be some day fixed, by a general understanding,” to bring to close the debate on the Oregon Treaty, the agreement to formalize the boundary between Canada and the United States at the 49th parallel. For nearly four months, the Senate had been

debating this treaty involving a long-standing boundary dispute with Great Britain. Settlement of the treaty would end that argument and also pave the way for creation of the new state of Oregon.

Unfortunately for Allen and his allies, there was no mechanism in place to force a vote, or even to encourage a vote. Cloture, as we know it today, was not established until 1917. As Allen explained, the Senate had not adopted the House’s practice of calling the “previous question,” nor was it “the habit of the Senate to pass a resolution to take a subject out of discussion.” Allen emphasized, however, that the Senate did have a practice of facilitating votes by “a conversational understanding that an end would be put to a protracted debate at a particular time.” The Senate responded to Allen’s suggestion in a typically polite but pointed manner. Tennessee senator Spencer Jarnagin opposed “the adoption of any rule or practice by which debate should be stifled.” Gentlemen could “determine for themselves” when proper action should be taken. And so, the debate over the Oregon Treaty continued.³⁷

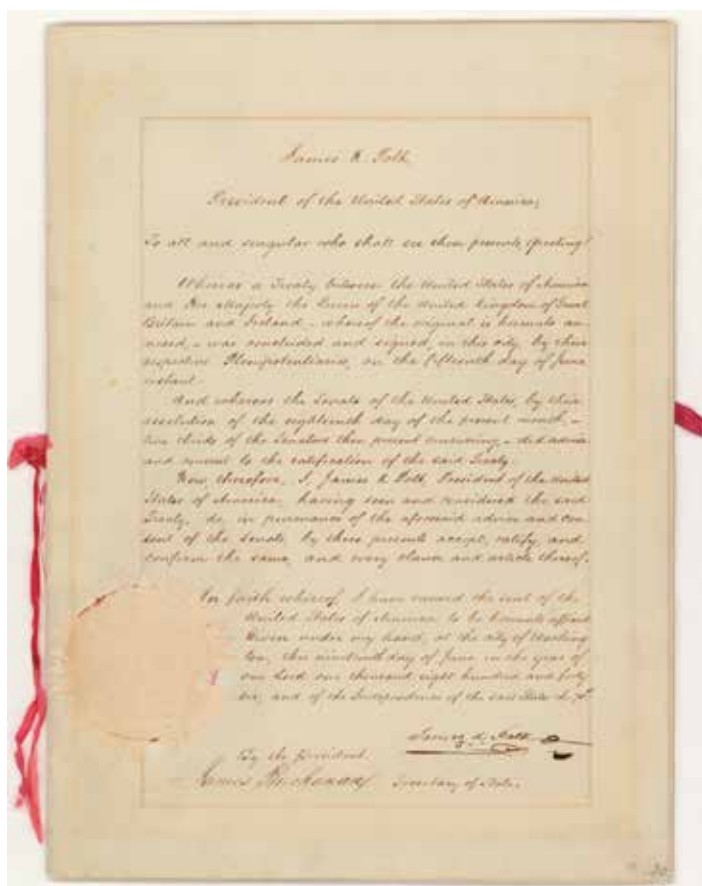
On April 13, 1846, Allen again took the floor. A vote on the Oregon question was inevitable, he argued, so why not agree “to the exact day on which the Senate would proceed to vote.” Such action would be acceptable, argued Kentucky’s James Morehead, “provided it was not to be regarded as establishing a precedent.” But, of course, that’s exactly what happened. On April 16, after weeks of debate, senators reached a consensus and agreed unanimously to end debate and call a vote. The Senate subsequently approved the treaty resolutions, a territory was established, and in 1859 Oregon became the 33rd state. Scholars believe this 1846 action was the first example of the Senate adopting a formal unanimous consent agreement.³⁸



Senator William Allen. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

Before long, such pacts were common, but into the 20th century they remained just a “gentlemen’s agreement.” As one presiding officer complained, they could be “violated with impunity” by any senator. To remedy that situation, in January of 1914 the Senate adopted a new rule stating that unanimous consent agreements “shall operate as the order of the Senate” and could be altered only by another UC agreement.³⁹

By the 1950s, UC agreements were a routine but limited procedural tool—and then Texas senator Lyndon Johnson became majority leader. Truly understanding the potential of this procedural device, Johnson revamped UC agreements to regulate the entire legislative process—to manage debate, to limit amendments, to schedule a vote, and to strengthen the force of his own majority leadership. Today, unanimous consent agreements remain an important tool in the procedural toolbox of the Senate majority leader.⁴⁰



Oregon Treaty signature page, 1846. National Archives.

The First Holiday Recess

In today’s Senate, sessions typically end in December, at a time when earlier senators would have been just getting started. That’s because the Constitution set the first Monday in December as the opening day of Congress, a system that remained in place for 144 years. This winter schedule fit the agrarian nature of the early republic, but it presented senators with some interesting problems—especially during the holidays.

In 1800, when Congress moved to the District of Columbia, the trip from Boston to Washington

typically took about a week, depending on the weather and other travel hazards. In December, due to icy roads and freezing waterways, even this relatively short journey could occupy several weeks. After enduring an often grueling journey to the Capitol, most senators did not go home again until Congress adjourned in the spring, then stayed home for six months or more until Congress convened again in December. This schedule meant that senators spent Christmas in Washington. Well into the 19th century, it was common for the Senate to be in session on December 24, adjourn for a day,



Senator Asa Biggs. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

and then return to business on the 26th. Since most of the senators' families stayed home, Christmas celebrations were usually lonely bachelor dinners held in boardinghouses or local taverns.

By the 1850s, however, railroads had improved travel conditions enough to allow for quicker, safer, and more comfortable trips to and from the Capitol. And, perhaps more important, Congress passed a new compensation bill that finally ended the per diem pay system that had been in place for decades. Under the per diem system, the more days a senator worked, the more he got paid. Beginning in 1855, senators received an annual salary. Before long, Congress passed a resolution to establish a holiday recess. "I think it . . . proper, particularly since the operation of the new compensation act," remarked North Carolina senator Asa Biggs in 1857, "that we shall now set a precedent for adjourning . . . during the holidays." And so, on December 23, 1857, barely two weeks after convening the first session of the 35th Congress—and following an eight-month adjournment—the Senate recessed until the New Year. A new tradition was born. Since then, with few exceptions,

usually during wartime, the Senate has enjoyed an annual holiday recess.⁴¹

The Christmas recess has had its critics, particularly under the old schedule of convening in December. In 1931, for example, with the nation locked in economic depression, the Senate adjourned sine die on March 4 and remained out of session until December 7. Nevertheless, as Christmas approached, the Senate planned for a holiday recess. "Congress has been absent from Washington now for nine months," complained William Borah of Idaho on December 17. "The result is that measures have accumulated, problems are pressing for solution . . . I do not think it is a proper thing for Congress to take a two weeks' recess." Borah lost that battle, but a solution came two years later. The "Lame Duck Amendment" to the Constitution—the Twentieth Amendment, ratified in 1933—moved the congressional convening date from December to January. Consequently, since 1934 the holiday recess has conveniently ended the session, rather than awkwardly interrupting its beginning, allowing for a much more logical legislative schedule.⁴²



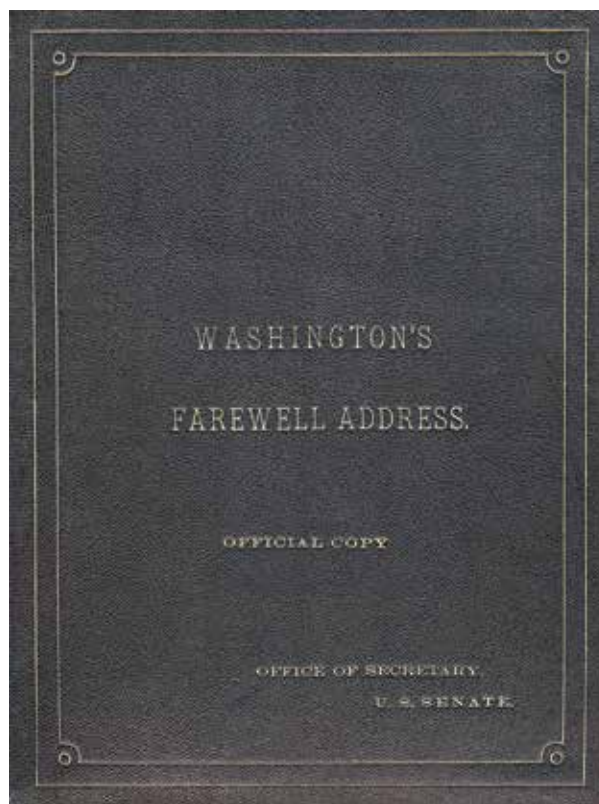
Senator William Borah. Library of Congress.

Annual Reading of Washington's Farewell Address

Every year, after the President's Day weekend, one of the Senate's first official tasks is the annual reading of George Washington's Farewell Address. Among the Senate's most enduring traditions, this practice dates back to February 22, 1862. "In view of the perilous condition of the country," Tennessee senator (and later president) Andrew Johnson proclaimed on that day, "I think the time has arrived when we should recur back to the days, the times, and the doings of Washington."⁴³

President George Washington had begun planning a farewell address as his first term came to an end in 1792. He had James Madison complete the draft, but then Alexander Hamilton and others persuaded the president to serve a second term. Four years later, Washington resurrected Madison's draft, asked Hamilton to revise it, and then personally polished it before publishing it in a Philadelphia newspaper on September 19, 1796. Quickly reprinted across the nation, the importance of the message was immediately apparent. "We recommend to our customers a careful preservation of this week's paper and a frequent perusal of its contents," commented the *New Hampshire Courier*.⁴⁴

In his message, Washington urged Americans to forego regional conflicts and partisan differences to pursue a common national interest. He warned that interference by foreign nations in domestic affairs could threaten the very stability of the young republic. Surprising to modern readers, the famous phrase "entangling alliances with none" does not appear in Washington's Farewell Address—those words actually come from Thomas Jefferson's first inaugural—but the sentiment is certainly stated in



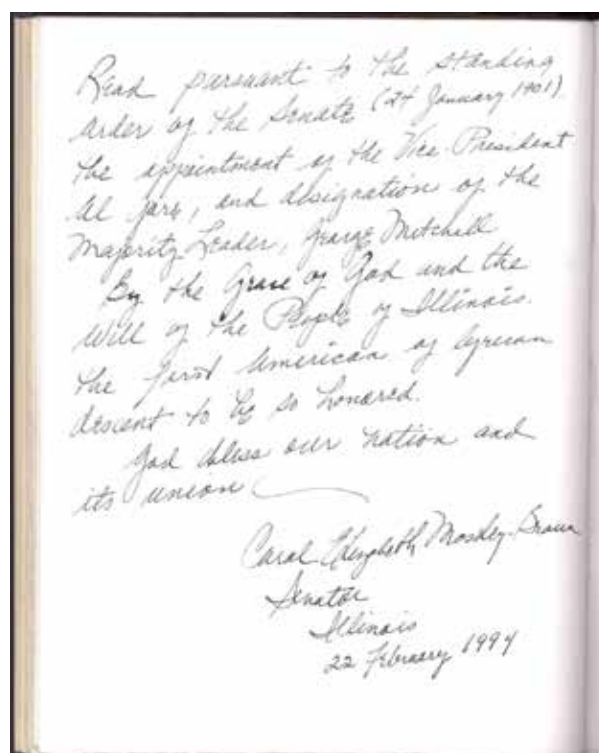
Washington's Farewell Address book. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

Washington's message. "The great rule of conduct for us, in regard to foreign nations," the retiring president proclaimed, is "to have with them as little political connection as possible."⁴⁵

The 1862 reading of Washington's address, which took place in the Chamber of the House of Representatives, reassured Civil War-era representatives and senators of the nation's durability, but it took another three decades for the Senate to establish an enduring tradition. Senators again asked for a reading of the address in 1888 in their Chamber, and beginning in 1896 it became an annual event. Every year, the Senate observes Washington's Birthday by selecting one of

its members (alternating between the two parties) to read the 7,641-word statement in legislative session. The list of senators who have read the address comprises a Who's Who of Senate history—Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, Robert Taft of Ohio, Walter George of Georgia, Dennis Chavez of New Mexico, John Sherman Cooper of Kentucky, Barry Goldwater of Arizona, Nancy Kassebaum of Kansas, and Carol Moseley Braun of Illinois, to name a few.⁴⁶

Since 1900 the senator chosen to read the address has inscribed his or her name and brief remarks in a leather-bound book, which is carefully maintained by the secretary of the Senate. The first entry bears the signature of Ohio senator Joseph Foraker. In 1949 Margaret Chase Smith of Maine became the first woman to fulfill the tradition. “As I read [the address],” Smith wrote in the book, “I wondered what our first President would think if he were alive today.” Minnesota senator Hubert Humphrey wrote in 1956 that Washington’s address “gives one a renewed sense of pride in our republic.” John Warner of Virginia noted in 1979 that the wisdom of Washington “has



Senator Carol Moseley Braun’s inscription in Washington’s Farewell Address book, 1994. Office of the Secretary of the Senate.

withstood the test of time.” The same could be said for this cherished Senate tradition.

Creating a Committee on Appropriations

For its first quarter-century, the Senate operated without permanent legislative committees. From 1789 until 1816, it relied on temporary “select” committees to manage legislative proposals. After a committee sent its recommendations to the full Senate, it went out of existence. In 1806, concerned about the increasing amount of time consumed in electing such committees, the Senate began sending new bills to previously appointed committees that had dealt with similar topics. Finally, on December 10, 1816, the Senate created 11 permanent “standing”

committees, including Judiciary, Foreign Relations, Commerce, and Finance. It did not, however, create a Committee on Appropriations.

For the next five decades, the Finance Committee handled most appropriations, but it did so in an increasingly haphazard fashion. Executive agency heads, wishing to appear frugal, often understated their funding needs to the House of Representatives and then, in the hectic final days of a session, quietly turned to the Senate for emergency funds. When agencies ran out of money, the threat of suspended

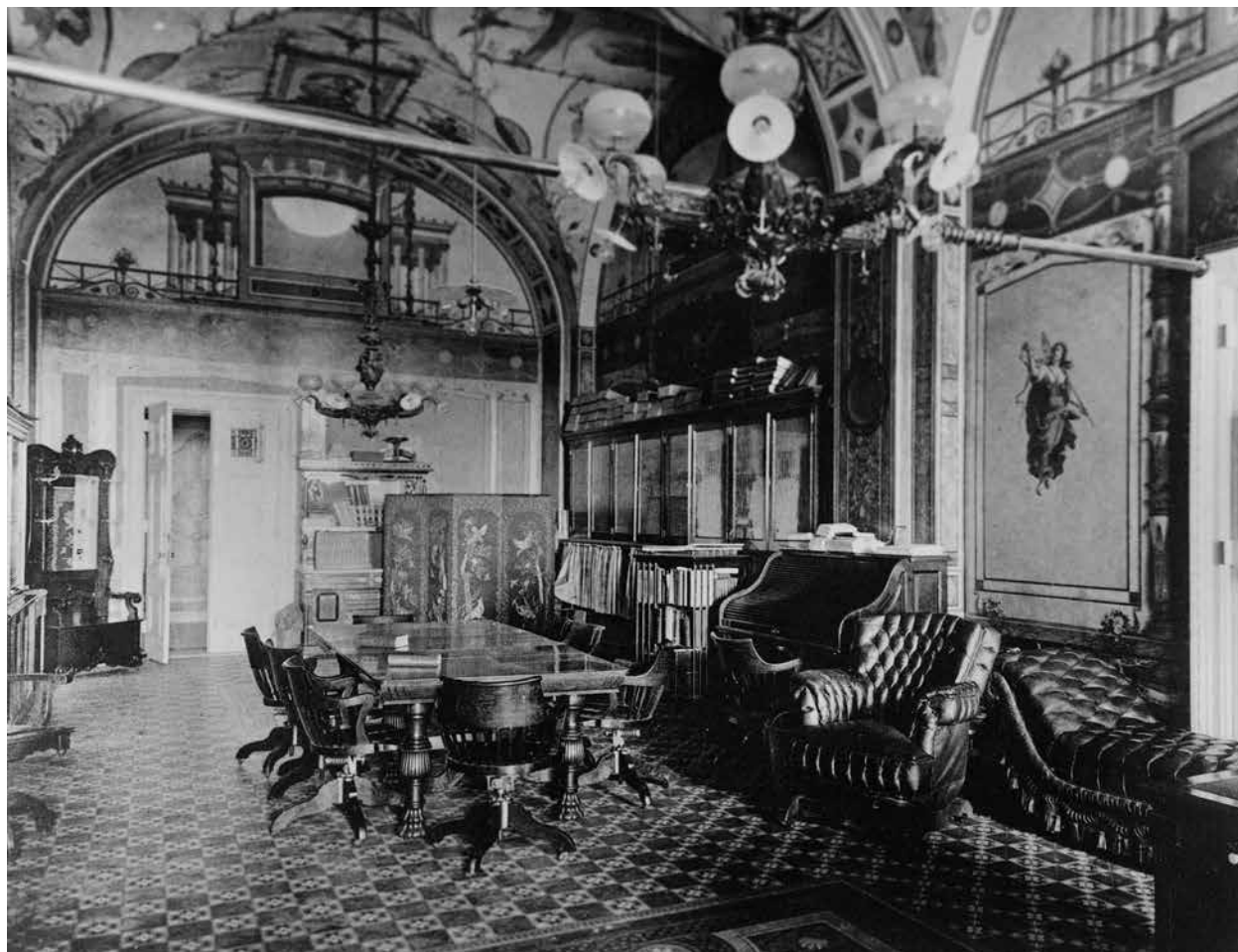
operations usually convinced Congress to replenish their coffers. When agencies ran a surplus, they simply spent it as they pleased.⁴⁷

By the 1860s, it became clear that the Senate needed to gain control over its appropriations process. The war with Mexico and then the Civil War had vastly expanded federal spending. In 1865, for the first time in national history, expenditures passed the billion-dollar mark. Furthermore, the lack of centralized control over appropriations played to the president's advantage, as the executive spent funds without first securing formal congressional appropriations. In other words, no less than the power of the purse was at stake.

Many senators also viewed appropriations reform as a potent weapon in their struggle with President

Andrew Johnson over Reconstruction policy. Following an example set by the House of Representatives, and ostensibly to lessen the workload of the Finance Committee, on March 6, 1867, Henry Anthony of Rhode Island proposed a "Committee on Appropriations, to consist of seven members" to "divide the onerous labors of the Finance Committee with another committee." The Senate unanimously agreed, and the Appropriations Committee was born. By separating the process of taxation from that of appropriations, senators hoped to gain better control over federal spending.⁴⁸

The new committee rapidly became a Senate powerhouse. Its status grew even more when the powerful William Allison of Iowa became chairman in



Senate Appropriations Committee Room, ca. 1900, from *History of the United States Capitol*, by Glenn Brown, 1902.

1881, a position he held for nearly a quarter century. Eventually, senators who did not serve on the committee began to resent the appropriators' use of funding power to shape national policy, prompting the Senate to strip the Appropriations Committee of seven major funding bills in 1899, referring them instead to the relevant legislative committees.

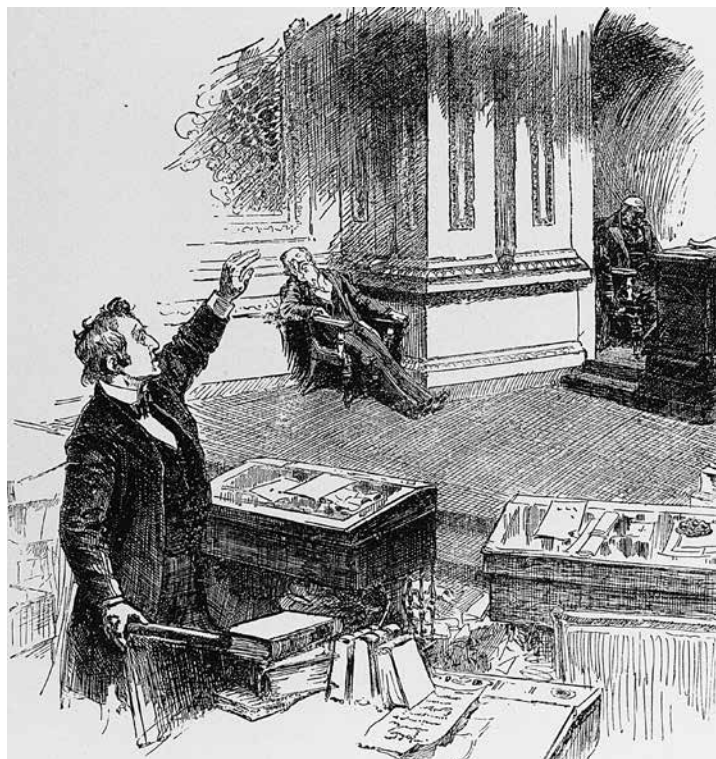
Two decades later, a new consolidation plan was put in place. Again prompted by war-related spending,

Congress passed the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921, which required an annual budget from the president and created the General Accounting Office to investigate and oversee the use of federal funds. Soon after, Appropriations chair Francis Warren of Wyoming introduced a successful resolution to again centralize the appropriations process, thereby restoring to the Committee on Appropriations the full jurisdiction that it still enjoys today.⁴⁹

Origins of the Filibuster

“Measures are too often decided not according to the rules of justice and the rights of the minor party, but by the superior force of an . . . overbearing majority.” So

wrote James Madison in *Federalist*, No. 10. The Senate became a protector of minority rights. One tool for guarding those rights—whether by a minority faction, a minority party, or a single senator—is the filibuster.



“An energetic filibuster,” from *Among the Law-Makers*, by Edmund Alton, 1896. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

Although it may seem that filibusters are a recent phenomenon, this legislative device dates back to the Senate of ancient Rome. It was used in American colonial governments, and it appeared in the very first session of the Senate. On September 22, 1789, Pennsylvania senator William Maclay wrote in his diary, the “design of the Virginians . . . was to talk away the time, so that we could not get the bill passed.”⁵⁰

The Senate’s antebellum period, known for its great orators and brilliant debates, was also a grand era of parliamentary maneuvering. Senators used every procedural trick available to oppose legislation, including delaying the process with long speeches. In 1841 the Democratic minority spun out the time to block a banking bill. Frustrated, Kentucky’s Whig senator Henry Clay threatened to change Senate rules to limit debate.

“I tell the Senator,” threatened a defiant William King of Alabama, “he may make his arrangements at his boarding house for the winter.” In an era when House members were restrained by the infamous “gag rule,” senators—even Clay’s fellow Whigs—chose to maintain their right to speak.⁵¹

By mid-century the strategy of “talking a bill to death” had gained a colorful label—filibuster. Said to have evolved from a Dutch word for “freebooter” and adopted by the Spanish as “filibusteros”—to describe the pirates then raiding Caribbean islands—the term began appearing in American legislative debates in the 1850s. “I saw my friend standing on the other side of the House filibustering,” commented Mississippi’s Albert Brown on January 3, 1853. Within a month, North Carolina senator George Badger complained of “filibustering speeches,” and the term became a permanent part of the political lexicon.⁵²

By the 20th century, Senate filibusters had reached new heights, moving beyond mere politics to become

entertainment. Loquacious senators like South Carolina’s “Pitchfork Ben” Tillman and Wisconsin’s “Fighting Bob” La Follette pushed the filibuster to the limits of human endurance. “[My voice will] hold out for six weeks and my strength will go with it,” warned La Follette as he began a 1908 speech. As historian George Haynes explained, “Senate non-stop oratory as an endurance test came to deserve rank with other feats of endless iteration like six-day bicycle contests, or the swimming of the English Channel.” Dramatic filibusters allowed senators to further their political agenda while mesmerizing the visitors who sat in the galleries. When used strategically at the end of a session, when adjournment would automatically kill a bill, these spectacles also proved to be quite effective.⁵³

Filibusters remained a cherished legislative tool for senators for well over a century, but in 1917, with the United States edging towards involvement in a foreign war, the filibuster became a problem, prompting the Senate to finally adopt its first official rule for cloture.

Grand Masters of the Filibuster

When the Senate adopted a cloture rule in 1917 to allow senators to end debate and force a vote on a bill or a nomination, many Americans thought the era of the filibuster had come to an end. Nothing could have been further from the truth. The new Senate rule required a two-thirds (and later three-fifths) majority to invoke cloture; therefore, successful cloture motions remained rare for many years while the filibuster thrived. In fact, as the 1917 rule went into effect, the Senate was just entering its era of the “grand masters” of the filibuster.

The 20th century’s first champion of the filibuster was Robert La Follette of Wisconsin. His 1908

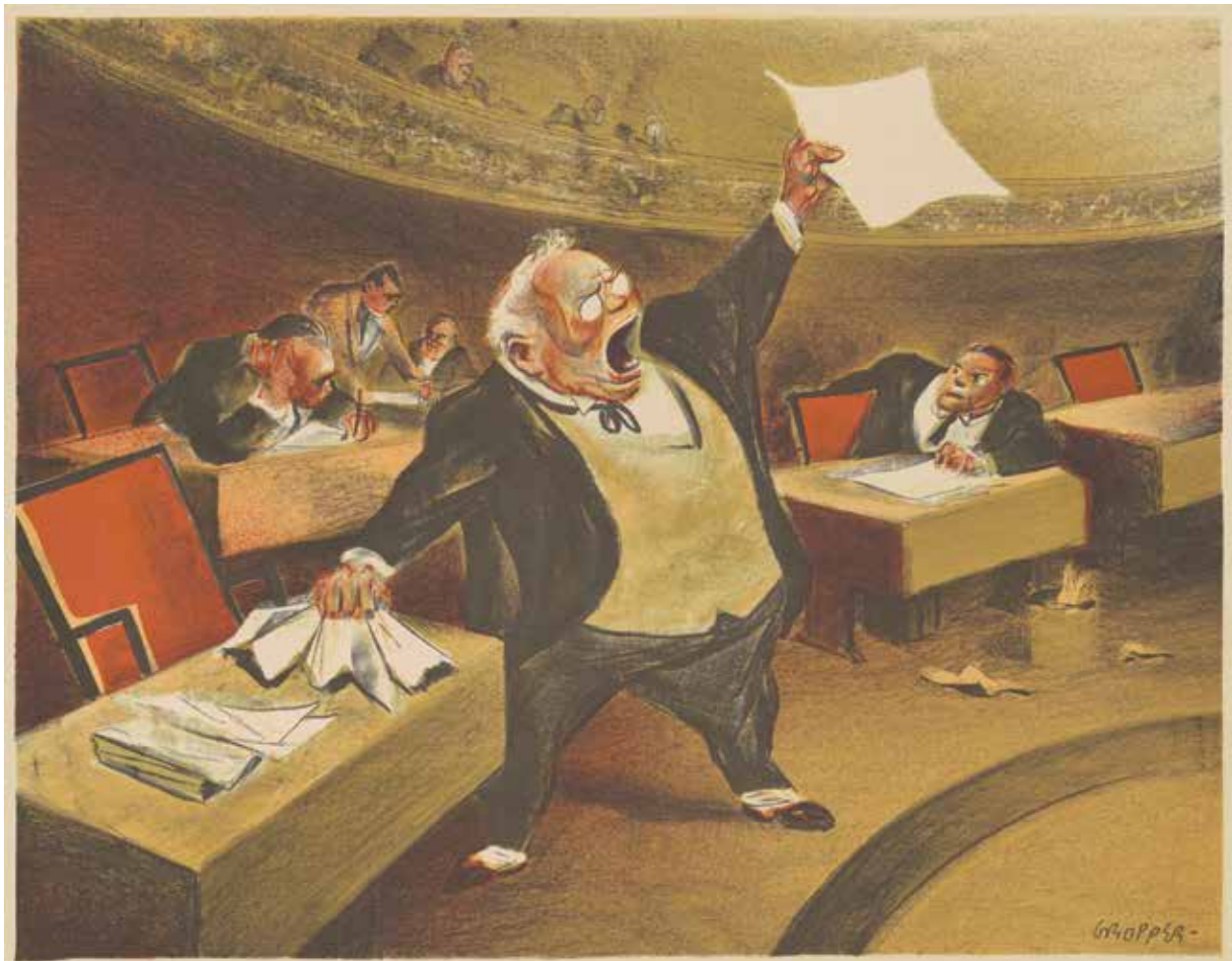
record—for speaking 18 hours against a currency bill—remained unbroken for 45 years. It was La Follette’s 1917 filibuster against a bill to arm merchant ships that prompted Woodrow Wilson to demand that the Senate adopt a cloture rule. Wilson got the rule, but that didn’t stop La Follette. His filibusters became legendary.⁵⁴

Next came “the Kingfish,” Huey Long of Louisiana. Long served less than four years in the Senate, but he packed a lot of talking into that short term. On June 12, 1935, Long staged his longest and most famous filibuster. When President Franklin D. Roosevelt opposed a Senate proposal to require senior employees of the National Recovery Administration be confirmed by

the Senate, Long took to the floor to demand passage of the provision—hoping to use the confirmation process to block his enemies from gaining coveted NRA jobs. As Long’s 15-hour filibuster continued, he used a variety of tactics to hold the floor. He analyzed each section of the Constitution, a document he claimed the president had transformed into “ancient and forgotten lore,” then recited his favorite recipes for fried oysters and potlikkers. At one point, seeing a number of senators dozing at their desks, Long demanded that Vice President John Nance Garner wake them up and make them listen. A cranky Garner replied, “That would be unusual cruelty under the Bill of Rights.” Finally, at four o’clock in the morning, nature called and Huey Long yielded the floor. His proposal failed.⁵⁵

Two decades later, independent-minded Wayne Morse of Oregon became a grand master of the filibuster. Elected as a Republican and later serving as a Democrat, Morse often found himself at odds with both parties. In 1953 he declared himself independent and threatened to place a folding chair in the middle of the center aisle of the Senate Chamber. It was in this context that Morse took the floor on April 24, 1953, to filibuster an offshore oil bill. Speaking for 22 hours and 26 minutes, Morse broke La Follette’s 45-year-old record. “There is nothing improper about [the filibuster],” Morse explained to his critics, “so long as it is done with good taste, with dignity, and with sincerity.”⁵⁶

Then, in 1957, Strom Thurmond of South Carolina set the record that still stands today. Speaking



Senate, by William Gropper, 1945. National Gallery of Art.

against a civil rights bill, Thurmond spoke through the night of August 28 and into the 29th, using his time to describe state laws on voting protection and to summarize relevant court cases, all in an effort to maintain racial segregation. “My purpose in making [this] extended address is for educational purposes,” he told his colleagues, “to educate the Senate and the people of the country.” With his pockets stuffed full of malted milk balls and throat lozenges, and taking advantage of every procedural opportunity to rest his

voice or lean into the cloakroom for a drink, Thurmond spoke for 24 hours and 18 minutes.⁵⁷

They were the masters—often entertaining, sometimes informative, and always provocative—but a new era was dawning. Thurmond’s 1957 speech was the latest in a string of filibusters staged to block civil rights legislation. Over time, such activities had tarnished the reputation of the filibuster, stirring demands for reform of the cloture rule, and bringing an end to the era of the grand masters.

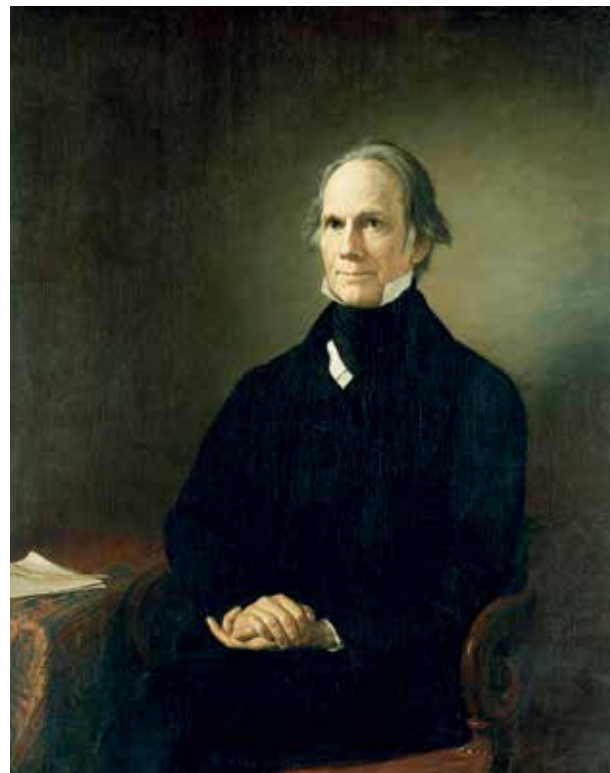
Establishing a Cloture Rule

The Senate’s first set of rules, adopted in 1789, stipulated that “no Member shall speak more than twice in any one debate.” That rule, which was routinely ignored by senators, was the only limit placed upon debate. Before the first Congress ended, the filibuster had already become a popular parliamentary tool for senators.⁵⁸

Early Senate rules did include a device known as “the previous question,” a parliamentary tool sometimes used by legislative bodies to end debate and force a vote, but in the Senate this device was never used for that purpose. From 1789 to 1806, when the rule was discarded as unnecessary, the Senate invoked the “previous question” 10 times, but not as a method for cloture. The Senate had “no intention of providing . . . a means of closing debate,” explained historian George Haynes. Harvard scholar Joseph Cooper concurred. The previous question “was used mainly for the purpose of avoiding or suppressing undesired decisions,” he wrote. “The previous question was not . . . used as a cloture mechanism.”⁵⁹

The first noteworthy attempt to limit debate came in 1841, when a Democratic filibuster against a banking bill infuriated Henry Clay. The Whig senator

proposed a new rule to “place the business of the Senate under the control of the majority.” Defiantly, Senators Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, and others denounced the idea as “a



Henry Clay, by Henry F. Darby, ca. 1858. U.S. Senate Collection.

palpable attempt to infringe the right of speech.” They demanded that the Senate block all efforts to impose a “gag rule.” Whig senators abandoned Clay and joined the Democrats to defeat Clay’s proposal.⁶⁰

During the Civil War, the Senate agreed to limit debate of war-related issues while in closed session but left intact full debate in regular session and on other matters. In 1872 the Senate placed a limit on debating amendments to appropriations bills, but only for that single session. The “Anthony Rule” of 1880, named for Rhode Island senator Henry Anthony, restricted speech by each senator prior to a vote to five minutes unless an objection was heard. If any senator objected, debate resumed. As the 20th century began, therefore, Senate debate remained unlimited, and filibusters continued to frustrate opposing senators, representatives, and presidents.⁶¹

Then came a showdown in 1917. As war raged in Europe, a Republican filibuster blocked President Woodrow Wilson’s plan to arm merchant ships. Fearing the Democratic president’s proposal would pull the nation into war, a group of Republicans successfully delayed a vote until the bill expired at the end of the Congress. An angry Wilson complained: “The Senate is the only legislative body in the world which cannot act when its majority is ready for action. . . . A little group of willful men . . . have rendered the great government . . . helpless and contemptible.” Ridiculing his opposition as “little old women,” the president demanded the immediate adoption of a cloture rule.⁶²

Many senators sympathized with Wilson, but some remained reluctant to give up their right to speak. Only in the Senate, they insisted, did the voice of the minority have a chance to be heard. Stirred on by the crisis of war, on March 8, 1917, the Senate adopted a cloture rule, but it required a hefty two-thirds majority to end debate. Some senators rejoiced, but as one historian noted, others insisted that free speech in the Senate “should still be the rule and cloture the exception.”⁶³



President Woodrow Wilson. Library of Congress.

That proved to be the case. Between 1917 and 1964, the Senate successfully invoked cloture only five times. During those years, filibusters became increasingly associated with efforts to block civil rights legislation, including anti-lynching bills. Multiple attempts were made in the 1940s and 1950s to alter the voting requirement for a successful cloture motion, but the Senate’s adherence to extended debate remained intact. By the time the Senate finally did invoke cloture on a civil rights bill in 1964, many senators had grown increasingly frustrated with cloture requirements and called for reform. Their efforts paid off in 1975 when the Senate reduced the number of votes required for cloture from two-thirds of senators voting to three-fifths of all senators duly chosen and sworn, or 60 of the current 100 senators. In recent years, the Senate has revised cloture again, establishing precedents to allow a simple majority to end debate on nominations, but it remains to be seen if the legislative filibuster will endure as a part of Senate procedure.⁶⁴

Smoking Banned in the Senate Chamber

It is often said that the Senate is a slow-moving, tradition-bound institution, but there have been moments when the Senate acted decisively to establish farsighted policies. Such was the case in 1914, when the Senate banned smoking in its Chamber.

Throughout the 19th century, senators, staff, and visitors took snuff and smoked cigars, pipes, and eventually cigarettes whenever and wherever they pleased. By 1889 the practice (and the odor) of smoking was so pervasive that Senator Justin Morrill of Vermont proposed a limit on smoking in the Senate Chamber. The Senate quickly rejected that proposal. A year later, Kansas senator John Ingalls took up the cause and succeeded—in a limited way.



Senator Benjamin Tillman. Library of Congress.

The Senate agreed to ban smoking in its wing of the Capitol, but it exempted senators from the ban. Anyone carrying a lighted cigar from the House side of the Capitol would be turned back, noted the *New York Times*, but senators could “continue to . . . puff out little clouds of tobacco smoke.”⁶⁵

Such efforts did lead to one restriction on smoking senators. An 1890 rule prohibited them from smoking in the Chamber during open sessions. Only in closed sessions, with the galleries cleared and the doors locked as the Senate considered executive business or issues of national security, would tobacco consumption be allowed. Consequently, when the Senate went into closed session, out came the cigars to fill the Chamber with a smoky haze. Closed sessions became very popular.⁶⁶

Of course, enforcing the open-session ban on smoking proved to be quite a challenge. On February 3, 1907, for example, the Senate gavelled out of closed session and opened the doors, but Massachusetts senator Henry Cabot Lodge refused to relinquish his Havana. In a cat-and-mouse game that greatly amused the visitors in the galleries, Senate pages chased Lodge around the Chamber, desperately trying to confiscate his still-smoldering cigar. When the day’s session ended, noted the *Washington Post*, Lodge strolled out of the Chamber, “cigar still firmly planted between his teeth.” The cagey senator had triumphed.⁶⁷

Such antics ended in 1914, thanks to South Carolina senator Benjamin Tillman, an often controversial figure who never shied away from inflammatory issues. In 1910 Tillman had suffered the first of several debilitating strokes. Over the next few years, failing health prompted him to try a regimen of radical and unconventional medical treatments—such as deep breathing exercises, drinking a gallon of water every day, adopting

a vegetarian diet, and completely avoiding tobacco. The smoke-filled Senate Chamber became a hazard to his health. “Senators who enjoy smoking and feel obliged to do it can retire to the cloak rooms,” Tillman noted, explaining that the smoke-filled atmosphere forced him from the Chamber, infringing on his rights as a senator.

On March 9, 1914, Tillman introduced Senate Resolution 42, stating that “no smoking shall be permitted at any time on the floor of the Senate, or lighted cigars be brought into the Chamber.” With the resolution under debate, Tillman pleaded, “Let us stop this smoking. [Let us] open the gallery doors every night, as well as prop open the Senate doors . . . so that pure air can come into the Chamber and wash it out and make it habitable and more healthy, and there will be fewer deaths among us.” Despite a predominance of smokers, the Senate unanimously approved Tillman’s resolution. Senators agreed that their ailing colleague should not be driven from the Chamber merely to protect what they termed the “very great pleasure” of smoking.⁶⁸



Senators Byron “Pat” Harrison, left, and Thomas Connally. Library of Congress.

Tillman died four years later, but the Senate kept the smoking ban in place. In June of 1998, the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration extended the ban to the rest of its Capitol Hill complex, leaving only a few designated areas for indoor smoking. It took more than 80 years, but the full Senate finally caught up with Ben Tillman.⁶⁹

Evolution of Modern Leadership

For more than a century, the Senate operated without formal party leaders. The vice president, or in his absence the president pro tempore, provided procedural guidance, but no single senator could be called “leader.” In 1885 political scientist (and later president) Woodrow Wilson wrote in his book *Congressional Government* that “no one is *the* senator . . . No one exercises the special trust of acknowledged leadership.” The position of “floor leader” (now often termed majority or minority leader) came much later, but that doesn’t mean that the Senate was devoid of leadership.⁷⁰

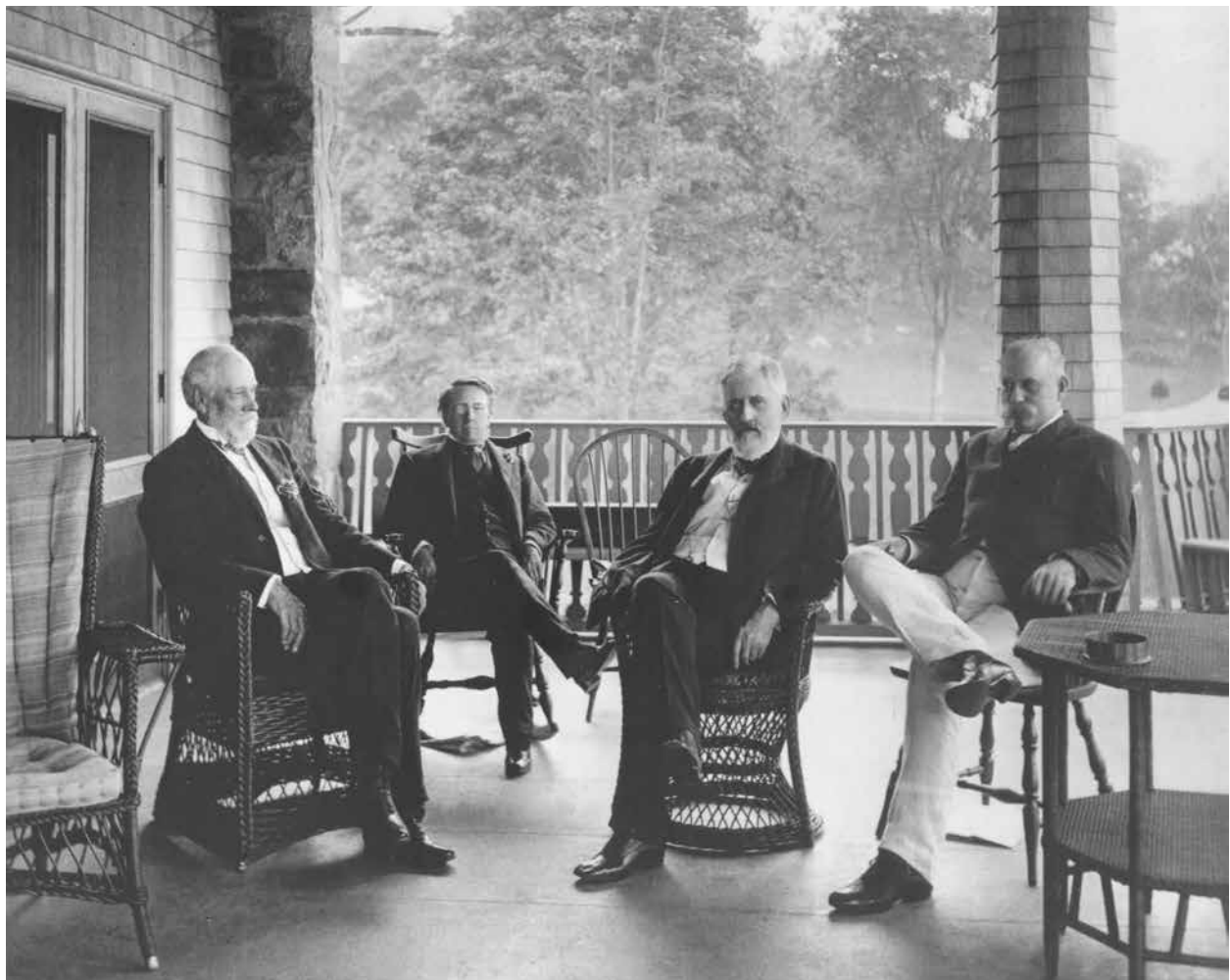
During the antebellum years, senators such as Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and John C. Calhoun—labeled by historians as “The Great Triumvirate”—were regional leaders with strong party affiliations who dominated Senate action. In the late 19th century, Senate party caucuses became more organized, electing caucus chairmen and establishing steering committees to plot legislative priorities and strategy. In 1890 Senate Democrats elected Maryland’s Arthur Gorman as chair of the party caucus and its steering committee. Gorman’s skill as a strategist and parliamentarian earned him praise in the

press as “the leader of his party in the Senate.” Gorman left the Senate in 1898 but returned in 1903 and was again elected as chair of the Democratic caucus. Gorman turned this position into one of power and influence. Readily acknowledged by his contemporaries as “the most influential man on the Democratic side,” Gorman took control of committee assignments and guided party opposition during a time of Republican dominance.⁷¹

By the turn of the 20th century, with the Senate under Republican control, a group of senators known as “the Senate Four” guided the legislative agenda. William Allison of Iowa chaired the Republican Conference and its steering committee. He also chaired

the powerful Appropriations Committee, supporting business interests and fueling the Gilded Age economy. Orville Platt of Connecticut built an expertise in tariff policy and constructed nearly every patent law of the era. John Spooner of Wisconsin, described as the “most brilliant man” in Congress, was an expert in constitutional law. Rhode Island senator Nelson Aldrich, chair of the Finance Committee, used his expertise to shape monetary policy.⁷²

Of the four, Nelson Aldrich came closest to being a modern floor leader. Theodore Roosevelt referred to him as the “King Pin” of the Republican Party. “Sure I bow to Aldrich,” Roosevelt remarked. “I’m just a president, and he has seen lots of presidents.”



The Senate Four, (L–R) Senators Orville Platt, John Spooner, William Allison, and Nelson Aldrich. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

Aldrich's deep knowledge of the issues and his ability to build coalitions made him a natural leader. Aldrich "knows when to bluff, when to bully, when to flatter and when to anger," commented the *Baltimore Sun* in 1901. Reporters referred to Aldrich as "floor leader," but he lacked an official title.⁷³

In the 20th century, struggles with increasingly powerful presidents, the crisis of the First World War, and the battle over the League of Nations further spurred the evolution of Senate leadership. When Woodrow Wilson became president in 1913, he came into office with an ambitious agenda that required a strong floor leader. Democrats turned to Indiana senator John Worth Kern. Although he had been in the Senate for only two years, Kern had been the party's candidate for vice president in 1908 and enjoyed strong party support. The Republican opposition to Wilson's policies was led first by Jacob Gallinger of New Hampshire, chair of the party caucus from 1913 to 1918, who often was named "floor leader" in the press. When Gallinger died in office in 1918, Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts stepped into the leadership void. There were still no officially designated party leaders, but Lodge's fierce battles with Wilson over the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 and 1920 made it clear he was *de facto* Republican leader. In the 1920s, both party caucuses adopted what had been the colloquial title of "floor leader," a label still used today. Democrats led the way in 1920, electing Alabama senator Oscar Underwood as floor leader. In 1925 Charles Curtis of Kansas gained that title for the Republicans.⁷⁴

Over the course of the 20th century, important milestones further defined and strengthened the role of floor leader.

Soon after becoming Democratic leader, Oscar Underwood moved from the back row of the Chamber to the first-row seat on the center aisle—and he held onto that spot even after he resigned as leader in 1923. When Underwood retired four years later, the new Democratic leader, Joseph Robinson of Arkansas, quickly grabbed the seat, a position held by every subsequent Democratic leader. Republican leaders had to wait another decade for the coveted across-the-aisle desk to open up. Finally, on January 5, 1937, elderly Kansas senator Arthur Capper relinquished the spot and Oregon's Charles McNary took the high-profile space still occupied by today's Republican leader. Paired across the center aisle, the strategic placement of the two party leaders' desks is a reminder of their status as "first among equals."

Vice President John Nance Garner, while presiding over the Senate in 1937, also enhanced the leaders' institutional power and prominence. Citing



Senate leaders Joseph Robinson, left, and Charles McNary, January 14, 1937. Library of Congress.

the Senate rule requiring the presiding officer to “recognize the Senator who shall first address him,” Garner announced that he would give priority recognition first to the majority leader, then to the minority leader, before all other senators wishing to speak. Although this did not seem significant at the time, it ultimately gave the floor leaders considerable control over daily Senate operations. These

milestones may seem inconsequential to the casual observer, but they served as significant steps in the evolution of modern leadership.⁷⁵

Wilson’s comment that “no one is *the* senator” may still hold true in an institution that has 100 very independent members, but modern floor leaders certainly exercise a special trust, given to them by their fellow senators, of acknowledged leadership.

A Congressional Codel

Since the days of the Continental Congress, members of Congress have traveled to distant locales to investigate and gather information. Limited to domestic travel in the early years, the scope of congressional excursions widened by the 1890s as American interests expanded to Hawaii, Cuba, Panama, the Philippines, and beyond. Officially, they were known as congressional “inspection trips,” but by the late 19th century they had gained a more colorful label, “junkets.”⁷⁶

In the early 20th century, congressional travel grew increasingly extravagant, and nearly all of these so-called “inspection trips” took senators to warm, tropical locations.

In the 1920s, during the years of Prohibition, quick trips to the Caribbean became especially popular. As winter continued in Washington, commented a reporter in 1923, members of Congress could be found on semitropical islands where everyone was “blissfully ignorant of the Volstead law.” By the



Senators on codel in 1943. (L–R) Senators Owen Brewster, Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., Richard Russell, James Mead, and Albert Chandler. Ralph Owen Brewster Papers, George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections and Archives, Bowdoin College Library, Brunswick, Maine.

1930s, with the nation locked in economic depression, such junkets became quite indefensible.⁷⁷

It took the Second World War, and one trip in particular, to repair the reputation of congressional fact-finding missions. On July 25, 1943, five senators boarded a military airplane to begin a 65-day,

40,000-mile tour of U.S. military installations around the world. The proposal for such a trip came from the Committee on Military Affairs and the Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program, better known as the Truman Committee. Named for its chairman, Missouri senator Harry Truman, the special committee had spent two years investigating waste and corruption in military contracts and construction facilities. As the war continued, the investigation expanded overseas.⁷⁸

Many senators were skeptical. No good can come from a “junketing trip by senators,” argued Missouri’s Bennett Clark. Majority Leader Alben Barkley, a pragmatic Kentuckian, also voiced skepticism, but he agreed to create a delegation. Chaired by Georgia senator Richard Russell, this traveling committee included Republicans Owen Brewster of Maine and Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., of Massachusetts, along with Democrats James Mead of New York and Kentucky’s Albert “Happy” Chandler. Each senator wore a dog tag and carried one knife, one steel helmet, extra cigarettes, emergency food rations, manuals on jungle survival,

and two military uniforms. The senators wore military uniforms in the fragile hope that, if captured, they would be treated more humanely as prisoners of war.⁷⁹

With instructions to investigate the quality and effectiveness of war personnel and materiel under combat conditions, the delegation inspected transport and supplies, investigated civilian war agencies, and met with commanders and troops. They toured nearly every theater of combat, traveling to England, North Africa, the Persian Gulf, India, China, and Australia. Upon their return, Russell and his team held a closed-door briefing for Senate leadership and submitted reports that provided vital information on military equipment and operations and framed key issues for post-war reconstruction.⁸⁰

Perhaps most important, this high-profile investigative tour set a solid precedent for future congressional fact-finding missions. Did this mark the end of “congressional junkets”? No, but it did signal the beginning of useful and informative congressional delegations known as “codels.”⁸¹

Congress on the Air

“It will profoundly change the Senate.” “It will benefit media-savvy members, forcing the retirement of those uncomfortable with new technology.” Such concerns were commonly heard in the 1980s as the Senate debated bringing television cameras into its Chamber. They also echoed complaints heard 60 years earlier, when the new medium was radio and the question was, “Should Congress go on the air?”

World War I produced significant advances in radio technology, and by 1920 radio pioneers were

exploring its entertainment and public service potential. In 1924 Senator Robert Howell of Nebraska, a former chairman of a national radio commission, became the first to formally propose that the Senate broadcast its proceedings. A few years later, North Dakota’s Gerald Nye called for a 50,000-watt “super-power station” on Capitol Hill to produce an audible *Congressional Record*. When research indicated that a whopping \$3.3 million would be needed to implement such a plan, the proposal died, but it wasn’t just sticker shock that killed the idea.

As the Senate considered radio coverage, many wondered if senators would have an audience. Some debates “arouse as much public interest as a championship prize fight,” commented a skeptic in 1927, but no one “wants to listen to the monotonous dronings that make up the typical legislative day.” Others argued that the Senate just wasn’t ready to take such a bold step into the modern world. “The chief drawback here is the attitude of the Senate itself,” explained a *New York Times* reporter in 1929. “Most of its members are . . . constitutionally opposed to the idea of broadcasting its proceedings.”⁸²

The idea surfaced again in 1944, following the successful radio broadcasts of the Democratic and Republican Party conventions. On August 15, Senator Claude Pepper of Florida called for radio coverage of congressional debate. If the people of the country “could by the marvel of the radio . . . be witnesses of the deliberations of their Representatives and Senators in Congress,” he said, “I believe it would be in furtherance of the democratic process.” Pepper’s efforts also failed.⁸³

Finally, in 1945, Congress hit the airwaves with *Congress on the Air*, a weekly program broadcast at 8:00 p.m. on Sundays. Competing against the popular *Fred Allen Show* and the mystery series *Crime Doctor*, the half-hour program featured members of Congress discussing major issues of the day, such as the October 9 debate between New Mexico senator Carl Hatch and Alexander Wiley of Wisconsin on the proliferation of atomic weapons. A modest success, this program fell far short of gavel-to-gavel coverage of Senate action but did lead to other suggestions. “Congress in Action,” for example, was a proposal to air Senate floor debates every Wednesday. Such programming could be very popular, argued proponents, allowing constituents to listen to congressional sessions the way they do baseball games, Frank Sinatra’s voice, or Jack Benny’s jokes.



Senator Robert Howell. Library of Congress.

But radio-shy members wondered who would decide the topic of debate, and how would they avoid just putting on a show for the listening public?⁸⁴

Although the friends of radio failed in their attempts to broadcast floor proceedings, they had more success with committee action. Radio microphones became a familiar sight in congressional hearings by the 1940s as resistance to radio coverage diminished, but the change in attitude came too late. By then, a new phenomenon had captured the American imagination, and discussions of radio broadcasts from Capitol Hill soon fell victim to the excitement over television.

“Today we catch up with the 20th century,” Majority Leader Robert Dole told the C-SPAN audience on June 2, 1986, as Senate television coverage began. “No longer will the great debates in this Chamber be lost forever.” No doubt, that’s exactly what Nebraska’s Robert Howell had in mind—back in 1924.

The Senate Gets a New Gavel

It was the latest in a string of long and exhausting late-night sessions in 1954. The Senate was engaged in a fierce debate over the future of atomic energy. Perhaps patience was growing thin. Maybe the weary senators were more unruly than usual. Sitting in the presiding officer's chair, a frustrated Vice President Richard Nixon struck the desk with the Senate's ivory gavel. Calling for order in the noisy Chamber, he banged the gavel again, and it cracked. One can only imagine how Nixon felt at that moment—probably like a guilty child who had just broken his mother's precious family heirloom.⁸⁵

Few Senate artifacts are as treasured as the gavel. It is unknown just when the Senate began using the hourglass-shaped instrument. Some stories take it back to 1789, when Vice President John Adams called the first Senate to order in New York City. According to most accounts, however, Adams typically restored order by tapping the desk with his silver pencil case. The gavel certainly was in use by the 1830s. Longtime doorkeeper Isaac Bassett, who began his 64-year Senate career in 1831, recorded in his diary that the gavel was used throughout his years of employment.⁸⁶

Regardless of its actual age, by the 1940s the old gavel was in poor shape, thanks in part to a careless presiding officer who had carved doodles into it with his pocket-knife. It developed cracks in 1944, requiring repairs. Silver caps were later added to both ends to avoid further damage. Then came that late-night session in 1954, which left it beyond repair. Clearly, it was time for a new gavel, but replacement was not an easy task. Ivory was already rare, and finding a suitable piece for carving proved to be difficult. In desperation, the Senate sergeant at arms appealed to the Indian Embassy for assistance. Fortunately, the newly independent nation was delighted to help.

A wooden model of the original gavel was quickly made and sent to India, where a craftsman duplicated the unusual piece in every way, then added a lovely floral band carved in relief around its center.⁸⁷

On November 17, 1954, Senate Majority Leader William Knowland and Minority Leader Lyndon Johnson escorted the Indian vice president into the Senate Chamber and introduced him to Vice President Nixon. Speaking to the Senate, the Indian official noted that the democratic institutions of the United States had been an inspiration to his own nation, which had turned to the Declaration of Independence for its guiding principles. He presented the gavel, he said, “in the earnest hope that the legislators of the Senate will discuss all problems, national and international, with calmness and composure, with freedom from passion and prejudice.”⁸⁸

The Senate now has two gavels, one very old and one relatively new. To preserve both, Senate cabinetmakers crafted a specially designed mahogany box. Every day, when the Senate is in session, the box is placed on the presiding officer's desk, a unique reminder of the Senate's enduring respect for its history and its traditions.⁸⁹



Senate gavels. U.S. Senate Collection.

The Enduring Tradition of Maiden Speeches

“Always vote with your party and keep your mouth shut for at least four years!” That was the advice given to the newly elected senator from Arizona, Barry Goldwater, in 1953. This stern admonition came from Arizona’s senior senator, Carl Hayden. In those days, freshman senators were expected to remain silent for a substantial period of time before giving their first major speech in the Senate Chamber. Considered a sign of humility, waiting at least a year to deliver a maiden address indicated a willingness to listen and learn from more senior members. When a senator finally did deliver that important speech, he or she did so before a full Senate Chamber and galleries packed with family and friends.⁹⁰

Well into the 20th century, most senators respected this tradition and waited many months—even years—before speaking. Not surprisingly, some senators rebelled. Preston Plumb of Kansas dared to speak just four months into his term in 1877, prompting the *Washington Post* to condemn this “awful example,” insisting that “an important part of the Senate’s decorum is a rule that no Senator shall [speak] . . . until he has been there three years.” Wisconsin’s crusading and outspoken Robert La Follette, well known for his recalcitrant nature, wasted no time in delivering his premiere Senate speech. His 1906 maiden address came just 12 weeks into his first term, lasted eight hours, and filled 148 pages of the *Congressional Record*. A year later, Jeff Davis of Arkansas shocked everyone by delivering his maiden speech just nine days after taking office.⁹¹

These maiden speeches are noteworthy for their timing, but others are important for content, such as William Seward’s speech entitled “Freedom in the New Territories.” Seward became a senator in 1849



Senator Robert La Follette. Library of Congress.

and delivered his maiden address in the midst of the long debate over the Compromise of 1850. Rejecting the compromise proposed by Senator Henry Clay of Kentucky, and rebutting those claiming the constitutionality of slavery, Seward argued that a “higher law” trumped the Constitution and demanded an end to the institution of slavery. With that speech, Seward became a leader of the antislavery movement. “Seward’s speech will live longer,” commented *New York Tribune* editor Horace Greeley, “and exert a more . . . pervading influence . . . than any other speech of the session.” Occasionally, a maiden speech is so riveting in substance or presentation that it can’t help but be noticed. In 1926 Indiana senator Arthur Robinson delivered a first speech that opposed U.S. entry into a world court and prompted such a heated



Senator Arthur Robinson. Library of Congress.

debate among his colleagues that, according to the *Washington Post*, it “provided the packed galleries with one thrill after another.”⁹²

Some maiden speeches happen spontaneously, as senators feel so compelled to speak that any thought of tradition quickly disappears. Soon after taking

the oath in 1979, Massachusetts senator Paul Tsongas had no plans to deliver his maiden address, but while listening to the closed-circuit audio feed from the Senate floor, a colleague’s floor statement caught his attention. “I don’t agree with that,” Tsongas proclaimed, then rushed to the Senate Chamber, gained recognition, and began an impromptu speech. “Well, about five minutes into this address,” recalled a staff member, “you hear this bang as those twin swinging doors of the center aisle . . . fly open and puffing down the aisle comes Ted Kennedy.” Tsongas, in his rush to speak, had not informed his senior colleague, Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts, of his intention to speak, breaking with yet another aspect of this cherished Senate tradition. As that staffer noted, “He just had something to say and he went down and said it.”⁹³

By the 1970s, the old practices were disappearing as freshman senators began to routinely reject the antiquated notion that a new senator should be seen and not heard. Today, new senators often deliver their first major speech within days, perhaps hours, of taking office—and in full view of the television cameras. Nevertheless, the significance of the event lives on. Maiden speeches continue to be an important milestone in every senatorial career.

Give Us a (Summer) Break!

“How shall we modernize Congress, and update the machinery of democracy?” asked Senator Gale McGee in 1965. His answer? An August recess! In fact, although this Wyoming senator may be best remembered for his rather eccentric wardrobe, Gale McGee should be remembered as the champion of the summertime break.⁹⁴

From 1789 until the 1930s, Congress convened in December, stayed in session for five or six months, and then adjourned sine die. Occasionally, legislative demands kept Congress in session longer, but generally senators agreed with Speaker of the House and later vice president John Nance Garner, who reportedly proclaimed, “No good legislation ever comes out of Washington after June.” By the 1950s, however, the



Senator Gale McGee. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

schedule had changed. In 1956 Congress adjourned on July 27—marking the last time the Senate adjourned before the first of August.⁹⁵

Gale McGee was not the first senator to propose a summer break. In 1959 Margaret Chase Smith of Maine had warned of the Senate's increasing workload. "The pressures under which Congress works every year at this time of year . . . create disorder," she complained, as well as "confused thinking, harmful emotions, destructive tempers, unsound and unwise legislation, and ill health with the very specter of death hanging over Members of Congress." If that sounds dramatic, keep in mind that in the 1950s senators died in office at a rate of about two per year. Smith proposed an annual break from August to October, but the Senate ignored her words of caution.⁹⁶

By the early 1960s, legislative sessions had crept well into autumn. In 1962 the Senate met from January to October with no recess. In 1963 it convened in January and adjourned in December with no break longer than a three-day weekend. Majority Leader Mike Mansfield complained that he no longer recognized his wife during daylight hours. "It is time to stop kidding ourselves," Gale McGee exclaimed. It was time to face the "facts of legislative life." Repeatedly, McGee called for a summer recess, and each time the idea split the Senate along generational lines. Older senators preferred the traditional system of doing business—come to Washington in January, complete business by summer, and go home. No need for weekend trips or state work periods. Senators had plenty of time to deal with home-state business and reelection campaigns. But younger senators, facing the realities of the modern Senate, wanted a designated six-week summer recess to allow them to plan family vacations and reconnect with their constituency.⁹⁷

By 1969 McGee had gained enough support for a test run. The Senate recessed from August 13 to September 3 that year. Young reformers gleefully left town, while older members grumbled. "There's too much work piling up," snarled one. "Now we'll be here till Christmas!" Come September, the reviews were



Senator Margaret Chase Smith. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

mixed. It certainly was “no vacation,” insisted George Aiken of Vermont, who discovered that his Senate work followed him home. But even critics acknowledged that the break provided useful opportunities to meet with constituents. “The feedback you get while hitting the fish fries . . . gives you a totally different feeling than you get in Washington,” confessed Indiana’s Vance Hartke.⁹⁸

Finally, on August 6, 1971, as mandated by the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970, the Senate began its first official August recess. Thanks to the persistent efforts of Senator McGee and his allies, the Senate would finally prove Vice President Garner wrong. Good legislation *can* come out of Washington, even *well* past June—if the Senate gets an August recess!⁹⁹

The Senate Goes on TV

In 1986 live television coverage began in the Senate Chamber. “I think the country will love the Senate,” predicted former Tennessee senator Howard Baker. “It is populated by some of the choicest characters in the whole political spectrum.” That summer day in 1986 was indeed a

landmark in Senate history, but the milestone was a long time coming.¹⁰⁰

Television first came to the Senate in 1947, when cameras recorded Secretary of State George Marshall testifying about his European recovery plan before the Foreign Relations Committee. In 1951 Tennes-

see senator Estes Kefauver’s crime investigation became a major television event. By 1954, when television coverage of the Army-McCarthy hearings helped to expose the underhanded methods of Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin, it was clear that television had become a permanent fixture on Capitol Hill.

In 1960 producers at ABC proposed televising Senate debates. This induced a reporter to ask the Democratic whip, Mike Mansfield of Montana, if he agreed with the idea. “I sure as hell do not,” responded the usually



Television cameras cover a hearing of the Kefauver Committee on organized crime, ca. 1951. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

mild-mannered Mansfield. “Television would amount to offering entertainment,” he insisted, “and this is no place for entertainment.” During the subsequent 16 years that Mansfield served as majority leader, TV cameras got into the Senate Chamber only once. They were installed in 1974 to film the anticipated impeachment trial of President Richard Nixon, which never took place, and then remained to cover Nelson Rockefeller’s vice-presidential swearing-in ceremony. After that, the cameras were quickly removed.¹⁰¹

When the House of Representatives agreed to allow C-SPAN broadcasts in 1979, the Senate faced the possibility of becoming the invisible half of Congress. Republican Leader Howard Baker tried repeatedly but unsuccessfully to bring TV into the Senate. Democratic Leader Robert Byrd was initially skeptical, but he changed his mind after being erroneously introduced to a West Virginia audience as the Speaker of the House. “That was a warning to me,” Byrd explained, “that we’d better go on television.”¹⁰²

Kansas senator Robert Dole became Republican leader in 1985 and joined forces with Byrd to win approval for an experiment with television. It began with a test run of closed-circuit coverage shown only in Senate offices. Then, on June 2, 1986, a second trial run began when C-SPAN broadcast the Senate live on national television. “Father in Heaven,” prayed the Senate chaplain as the Senate launched its experiment, “guide, direct, and bless this trial marriage . . . Forbid that the Senate should become the servant of . . . television . . . which requires that every segment be filled with excitement . . . and every problem be solved in 30 minutes.” During these trial runs, the Senate worked



Senator Robert Dole on C-SPAN’s first day of live coverage of Senate floor proceedings, June 2, 1986. C-SPAN.

out technical problems, adjusted the lighting, and learned that it was a mistake to play Tchaikovsky’s *1812 Overture* during quorum calls.¹⁰³

Just one more hurdle remained. After six weeks of live broadcasts, the Senate pulled the plug on the cameras to allow for two weeks of discussion about the merits of televised proceedings. “I fear that television will replace substance,” complained Louisiana’s Bennett Johnston. Wisconsin senator William Proxmire worried that television cameras would reduce the Senate to a vaudeville act. John Stennis, Mississippi’s senior senator, predicted the Senate on television would become a forum for presidential candidates. Despite such concerns, on July 29, 1986, senators voted 78 to 21 to turn the cameras on—permanently.

At that point, there was no turning back. The Senate had entered a new era. “I’m ready [for television],” declared Virginia senator Paul Trible as he adjusted his red tie before going into the Chamber. “The question is, is America ready for 100 United States senators on the air?”¹⁰⁴



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CHAPTER 2

Senators Famous and Forgotten



The Famous Daniel Webster

In 1850, at the height of his Senate career, Daniel Webster was famous, but he faced the future with trepidation. The 68-year-old Massachusetts senator feared that he would never achieve his lifelong dream of becoming president. Alcoholism was ruining his health, and the bitter dispute over slavery threatened to destroy the nation. On March 7, in an effort to ward off a fateful split between North and South, Webster staked his reputation on a speech designed to build support for the Compromise of 1850. Known as Webster's "Seventh of March Speech," it is one of the most important speeches in Senate history.¹

"Mr. President, I wish to speak today, not as a Massachusetts man, nor as a Northern man, but as an American," Webster began in his famous booming voice. "I speak for the preservation of the Union. Hear

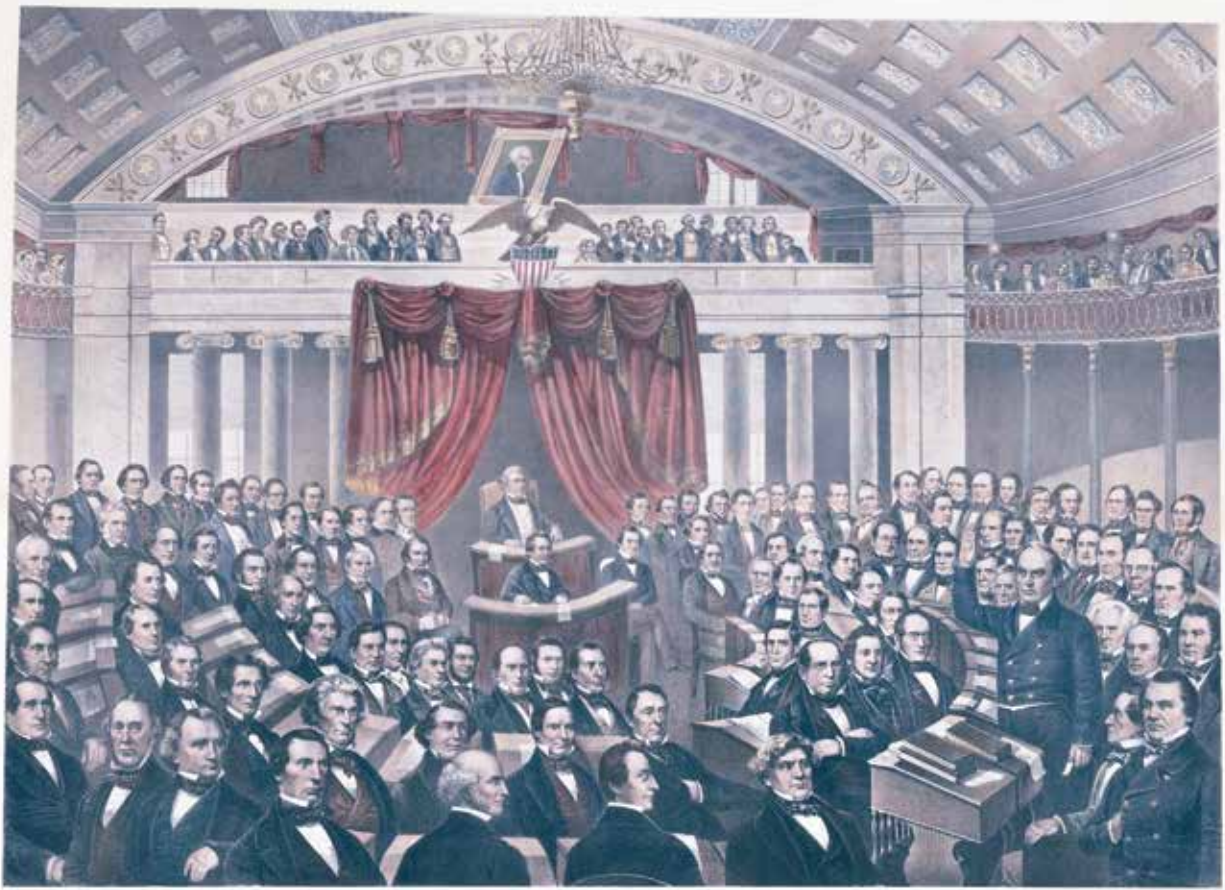
me for my cause." Word of his upcoming speech had circulated throughout the capital city, and the galleries of the Senate Chamber were overflowing with spectators. "At an early hour," stated one contemporary, "the Senate-chamber was completely occupied by ladies, and such few gentlemen as had been able to obtain admittance, who endured several hours' patient possession of seats, and even of the floor, that they might hear the long-expected speech of the Senator from Massachusetts." Webster continued speaking for another three and a half hours.²

Webster's speech echoed the sentiments of many in 1850. It was pointless to argue about slavery where it already existed, he explained. Slaveholding states would never accept abolition. Likewise, he contended it was futile to discuss the extension of slavery into the arid Southwest, which was ill-suited to plantation agriculture. Moderating his usually more extreme views to support compromise in hopes of maintaining the Union, Webster insisted that the property of slaveholders should be protected, but he insisted on enforcement of the boundaries established by the 1820 Missouri Compromise. He pleaded for citizens and legislators to turn away from talk of abandoning the Union: "Secession! Peaceable secession! Sir, your eyes and mine are never destined to see that miracle." Instead of "dwelling in these caverns of darkness, instead of groping with those ideas so full of all that is horrid and horrible, let us come out into the light of day; let us enjoy the fresh air of liberty and Union."³

Webster's speech, carried by the telegraph and printed in newspapers, quickly gained attention throughout the nation. The response from pro-Union supporters was overwhelmingly positive—except in



Senator Daniel Webster. Library of Congress.



DANIEL WEBSTER ADDRESSING THE UNITED STATES SENATE

IN THE GREAT DEBATE ON THE CONSTITUTION AND THE UNION 1850.

"Daniel Webster Addressing the United States Senate / In the Great Debate on the Constitution and the Union 1850," by James M. Edney, 1860. U.S. Senate Collection.

Webster's native New England. The speech slammed into Massachusetts with the force of a hurricane, noted one historian, and abolitionists accused the senator of colluding with slaveholders. It was a "vile catastrophe," charged reformer Horace Mann. Webster once "walked . . . among the gods," but now "[mingles with] harlots and leeches." "How came he there?" asked Ralph Waldo Emerson, wondering how New England's champion became a supporter of slavery. Even as Webster's fame grew across the nation, therefore, it quickly became clear that he had destroyed his northeastern political base.⁴

By the summer of 1850, as the divisive debate over the compromise continued, Webster's future was looking dim. Then, in July, President Zachary Taylor died, and his successor, Millard Fillmore, offered Webster the post of secretary of state, a position he had held a decade earlier. Realizing that he was unlikely to regain election to his Senate seat, but still hopeful for a presidential bid, Webster accepted Fillmore's offer. As secretary of state, Webster launched his final quest for the presidency. Without his northern support, however, the famous senator couldn't even gain the Whig Party nomination and didn't live to see the election of Democrat

Franklin Pierce. Webster died on October 24, 1852.⁵

Twelve thousand spectators showed up to see Webster buried in a simple ceremony in Marshfield, Massachusetts. “A great light is extinguished,” proclaimed one eulogist; “A high priest in the temple of

our liberties has been stricken down.” Webster’s critics also offered eulogies, claiming the great man’s political career had been more promise than substance, but today no one remembers the critics. In death, as in life, Daniel Webster remains famous.⁶

Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri

Old Bullion Benton

Tom Sawyer was bored. He had vowed to abstain from smoking, chewing, and swearing, so he had little to do for entertainment, but as Mark Twain explained in his acclaimed novel, the Fourth of July was approaching and Tom eagerly awaited the festivities. After all, “the greatest man in the world,” the man Tom thought to be a giant in American politics—Senator Benton—was scheduled to speak. Alas, when Senator Benton appeared, even he proved to be a disappointment, “for he was not 25-feet high,” as Tom had supposed. He was not even “in the neighborhood of it.” Of course, Tom Sawyer is a fictional character, but Senator Benton was quite real.

Thomas Hart Benton represented the state of Missouri in the U.S. Senate for three decades, from 1821 to 1851. Born in Harts Mill, North Carolina, in 1782, the son of a wealthy lawyer, Benton heard the call of the West and moved his family to Tennessee. He established a plantation near Nashville, gained admittance to the bar, and pursued a political career. He also caught the attention of Andrew Jackson. During the War of 1812, Benton served as Jackson’s military aide. A year later, a disagreement between the two men ended in a wild gunfight that left Jackson badly wounded. Realizing his feud with

Jackson might hinder his political career in Tennessee, Benton moved further west, settling in the Missouri Territory. When Missouri became a state in 1821,



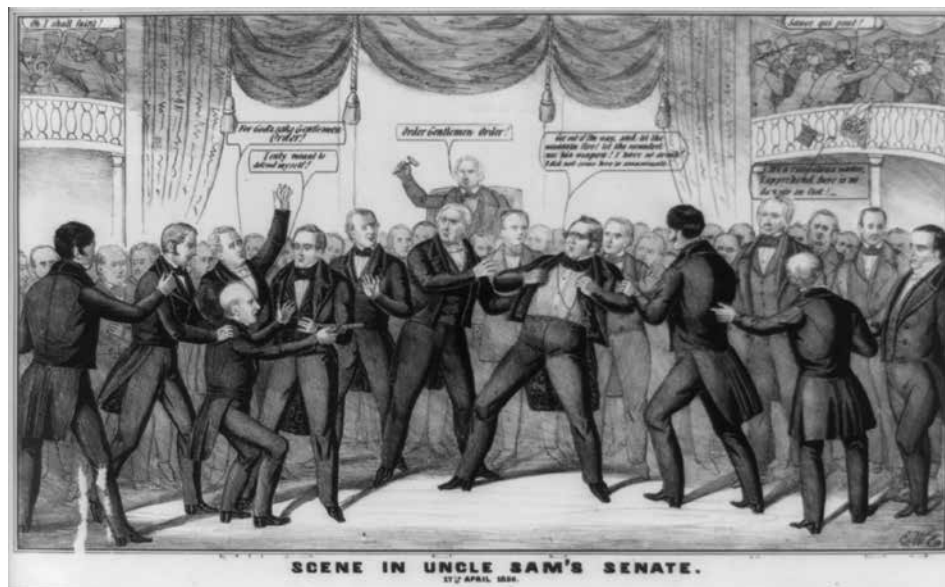
Thomas H. Benton, engraving by John Rogers, 1865.
U.S. Senate Collection.

Benton became one of its first two senators.⁷

By any standard, Tom Benton was a tough customer. He personified the causes he championed, particularly westward expansion and hard money, meaning gold coin, or bullion, rather than paper money. His dedication to that cause was so fierce that he became known as Old Bullion Benton.

By 1829, when Andrew Jackson became president, the two old foes had put aside their feud in favor of collaboration. Jackson led the Democratic Party and Benton served as trusted ally. When the Whig-controlled Senate censured Jackson in 1834 for actions related to his plan to remove government funds from the Bank of the United States, Benton staunchly defended the president and led the successful crusade to expunge that censure in 1837.⁸

By 1850 Benton was a senior statesman—the first person to serve 30 years in the Senate. Coming to the Senate with the Missouri Compromise, he finished his career with the fight over the 1850 Compromise, a set of resolutions designed to quell calls for disunion over the issue of slavery. During that turbulent debate, the increasingly antislavery, pro-Union Benton objected to a proslavery amendment presented by Mississippi senator Henry Foote. As Benton argued his point, he moved menacingly toward his much smaller colleague. Startled by the



"Scene in Uncle Sam's Senate. 17th April 1850" depicting the moment Senator Henry Foote drew a pistol on Senator Thomas Hart Benton, by Edward Williams Clay, 1850. Library of Congress.

approach of the brawny Benton, Foote pulled out a pistol. In a moment of high drama, Benton ripped open his coat and cried, "I have no pistols. . . . Let the assassin fire!" Panicked, the Senate quickly adjourned, averting bloodshed. The compromise passed, in altered form, without Benton's support. The "Magnificent Missourian" had fallen out of step with many of his constituents by 1850, and his refusal to support the possible expansion of slavery with the 1850 Compromise ended his Senate career.⁹

Thomas Hart Benton influenced legislation ranging from homestead acts to the telegraph, from annexation of Texas to the defense of the Union. He was an enslaver who ultimately sacrificed his Senate career to oppose the institution of slavery. As one eulogist noted, Benton was a man "of gigantic intellect, strong physical constitution, and imposing presence." Maybe he wasn't 25-feet tall, as Tom Sawyer had imagined, but Thomas Hart Benton was a giant of American politics.¹⁰

Charles Sumner of Massachusetts

A Leader for a New Generation

Something significant happened in the Senate on December 1, 1851. Newly elected Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner presented his credentials and took his seat in the Chamber. While a remarkable Senate career began on that chilly December morning, something else happened that was just as consequential. On that day, Charles Sumner took Daniel Webster's seat.¹¹

Less than two years earlier, on March 7, 1850, Daniel Webster had spoken in the Senate Chamber, delivering a speech designed to build support for the Compromise of 1850. Many Americans applauded the speech for its compromising tone and labeled Webster as champion of the Union, but in Webster's home state of Massachusetts, many saw it as betrayal. By supporting a legislative compromise that would allow for the continuation of slavery, the great Dan Webster had angered his home-state constituency. This speech brought an end to Webster's Senate career—and sparked the rise of Charles Sumner.¹²

When Webster delivered his fateful speech, Sumner had not yet entered elective office, but he had become an active member of Massachusetts's abolitionist community. Infuriated by Webster's address, Sumner condemned the compromise and denounced Webster for making concessions to proslavery forces. Sumner declared Webster an "archangel ruined," noted a Sumner biographer, and a "traitor to a holy cause." That autumn, just months after Webster's speech, Sumner delivered his own address, criticizing the compromise and calling for an end to the hated fugitive slave law that had been strengthened by that compromise.¹³

In a comment aimed directly at Webster, Sumner declared it was time to elect a man willing to stand



Senator Charles Sumner. Library of Congress.

up and oppose the slaveholding powers. In choosing a candidate, he insisted, voters should make their decision not based on party affiliation but based on character. "Three things at least they must require," he insisted. "The first is back-bone; the second is back-bone; and the third is back-bone." Many Massachusetts citizens believed that Sumner was just such a man. Two short-term appointments filled the seat for a few months, but it was Charles Sumner, elected by the state legislature to a six-year term in April of 1851, who took Webster's place—and then transformed the debate over slavery, carrying it through the Civil War to emancipation and Reconstruction.¹⁴

Sumner's swearing in was a pivotal moment in Senate history. It was more than a generational change, although Webster was 29 years older than Sumner. It was a transformation, real and symbolic, from compromise over slavery to refusal to accept

anything less than abolition. It marked a shift away from legislative settlements and toward violent confrontation. No one knew it at the time, but December 1, 1851—the day Sumner took Webster's seat—began a new era in Senate history.

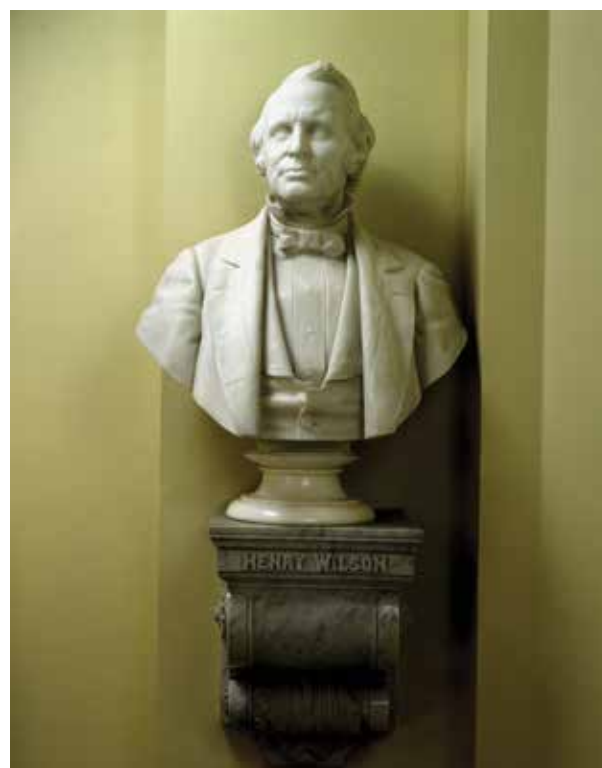
Henry Wilson of Massachusetts

The Cobbler of Natick

Henry Wilson of Massachusetts lived a truly Dickensian life. He endured a harsh, impoverished childhood, then rose through intelligence and determination to achieve success in business and government. For three decades, Wilson was among a handful of men who shaped national events. Even his death holds a unique distinction in the history of the United States Capitol. Yet, very few people have heard of him.

He was born Jeremiah Jones Colbath on February 16, 1812, near Farmington, New Hampshire, the son of an intemperate father. When Jeremiah reached the age of 10, his father indentured him to a nearby farmer, binding the boy to hard work and little schooling until his 21st birthday. He compensated for his lack of education by reading every book in the farmer's small library. When he turned 21, he changed his name to Henry Wilson. Striking out on his own, he walked south into Massachusetts, settling in Natick, a town west of Boston. He gained employment as a shoemaker's apprentice. Within a few years, Wilson had built a successful shoemaking business of his own, earning him the lifelong nickname, "The Cobbler of Natick."

In 1836 the 24-year-old cobbler's life took a dramatic turn when he visited Washington, D.C. It wasn't



Henry Wilson, by Daniel Chester French, part of the Vice Presidential Bust Collection. U.S. Senate Collection.

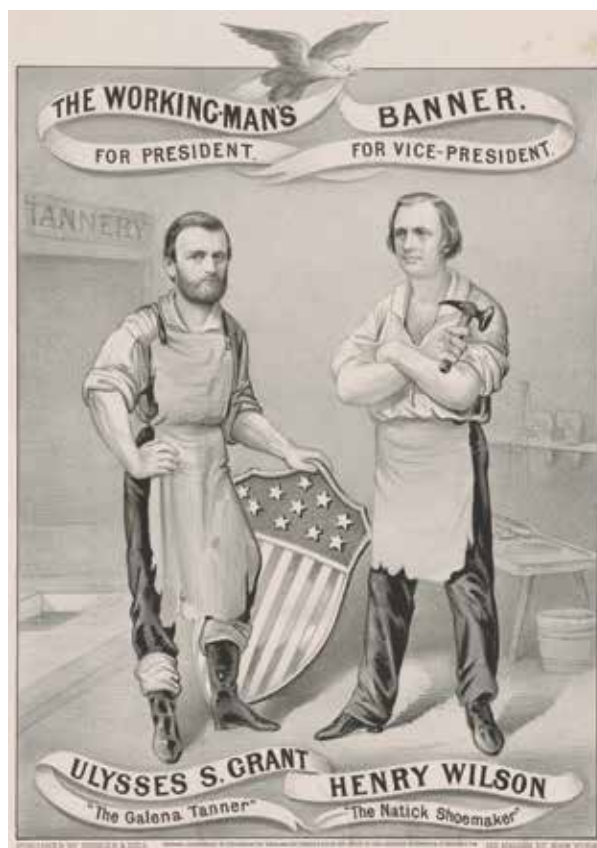
the grandeur of the city that caught his attention; it was the sight of enslaved men and women laboring in nearby fields and a slave auction held within sight of the Capitol. Wilson returned home determined, as he noted, "to give all that I had . . . to the cause of emancipation." He joined the new Massachusetts

Anti-slavery Society, became active in state politics, and emerged as a powerful voice for abolition. “Freedom and slavery are now arrayed against each other,” he declared in 1844. “We must destroy slavery, or it will destroy liberty.”¹⁵

Wilson’s entrance into national politics coincided with a period of turmoil in party development, as both the Whigs and the Democrats were torn into factions over the issue of slavery. Wilson joined the Conscience Whigs, then the Free Soilers, and for a while the Know-Nothings, and in the early 1850s he called for a unified antislavery party. In 1854 Wilson proposed “one great republican party” to oppose the controversial Kansas-Nebraska Act and its allowance for slavery in western territories. That year, he was elected to the Senate and became one of the first senators to join the new Republican Party.

During his 18-year Senate career, Wilson influenced military affairs and backed the transcontinental railroad, but his greatest achievements came in the realm of civil rights. He authored bills to free enslaved people in the District of Columbia, to permit African Americans to serve in the Union army, and to provide equal pay for Black soldiers. Following emancipation in the District of Columbia in 1862, Wilson pressured President Abraham Lincoln to issue a national emancipation proclamation. He introduced the first post-war civil rights bill in 1865 and was instrumental in passing constitutional amendments to guarantee citizenship rights for those freed from slavery.

Wilson’s service to party and purpose earned him the vice presidency. Chosen as running mate to Ulysses S. Grant in 1872, Wilson embarked on a grueling 10,000-mile campaign tour that seriously endangered his health. He became vice president in March of 1873 but soon after suffered a stroke. Much of his vice-presidential term was spent at home, recuperating and writing a memoir, but he returned to Washington in 1875 to preside over the opening of



“The Working-Man’s Banner. For President, Ulysses S. Grant, ‘The Galena Tanner.’ For Vice-President, Henry Wilson, ‘The Natick Shoemaker,’” Currier & Ives print, 1872. Library of Congress.

a new Senate session. On November 10, while in the Capitol, Wilson was struck by paralysis and carried to the vice president’s office. For 12 days, he received visitors from his sick bed in that Capitol office, and there he died on November 22, 1875. A decade later, the Senate commissioned a marble bust of Wilson to honor his service. The bust still stands in the vice president’s Capitol office.¹⁶

By any standard, Wilson’s career was remarkable, but the story of this Massachusetts senator is too often relegated to the footnotes of history. Preceded by Daniel Webster and overshadowed by Charles Sumner, Wilson’s fame was fleeting, but his contributions to the Senate, and to emancipation and civil rights, remain as enduring legacies of a senator once known simply as the Cobbler of Natick.¹⁷

Stephen Douglas of Illinois

The Little Giant

He was known as the Little Giant because his small 5-foot-4-inch frame could barely contain his powerful, oversized personality. One contemporary called him a “steam engine in breeches.” He was a prodigious lawyer, a powerful orator, an influential senator, and a master dealmaker. If we stretch his story just a bit, we might even credit this Democratic senator from Illinois with creation of the modern Republican Party. Mostly, his fame rests with a series of widely chronicled debates in 1858. His name was Stephen Douglas.¹⁸

Born in Vermont in 1813, as a teenager Stephen Douglas became enthralled by Andrew Jackson’s 1828 presidential campaign. “From this moment,”



Senator Stephen Douglas. Library of Congress.

Douglas recalled, “my politics became fixed . . . to the cause of Democracy.” He completed a classical education, read the law, and moved west to Illinois where his rise to professional prominence was nothing short of meteoric—elected state’s attorney at age 21, entered the state legislature at 23, became secretary of state at 26, and at age 27 took a seat on the state supreme court. For the rest of his life, he was known as Judge Douglas, even after he became a senator in 1847.¹⁹

At first, Douglas was overshadowed by other Senate giants—Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and Thomas Hart Benton, for example—but his legislative acumen quickly became apparent. When Henry Clay’s last great compromise failed to pass, Douglas skillfully disassembled that omnibus bill, repackaged it, and built a coalition of support around each of its key provisions. It was Stephen Douglas, not Henry Clay, who ensured passage of the 1850 compromise. Four years later, however, Douglas all but destroyed his own accomplishment.²⁰

Hoping to gain southern support for a railroad to connect Chicago with the West Coast, Douglas promoted the Kansas-Nebraska Act. That 1854 law repealed the Missouri Compromise and left the issue of slavery in the territories up to settlers, a policy known as “popular sovereignty.” The concept was consistent with the Illinois senator’s brand of democratic principles, but the law sparked a bloody conflict, inflamed the abolition debate, and produced such an outrage among northern slavery opponents that it destroyed old political alliances and spurred the creation of a new Republican Party.²¹

All of this happened well before Douglas famously debated Abraham Lincoln in 1858, when Lincoln challenged Douglas for his Senate seat. By that time, Douglas had known Lincoln for nearly three decades, as colleague and as competitor. Douglas defeated Lincoln in that Senate election, but Lincoln triumphed two years later, beating Douglas in the most fateful of presidential elections. When Lincoln took the oath of office as president on March 4, 1861, Stephen Douglas stood by his side. The Democratic rival held Lincoln's hat while the new Republican president gave his inaugural address.²²

Barely a month later, in the wake of the firing on Fort Sumter, the two men met again. Douglas assured Lincoln of his loyalty, then traveled throughout the Midwest to rally support for the president. When he returned to Illinois, Douglas asked his fellow Democrats to put aside partisan battles to support the Republican president and the Union cause. A wartime, cross-party partnership of these two statesmen from Illinois might have become the stuff of political legends, but on June 3, 1861, exhausted from his extensive travels, the Little Giant died of typhoid and liver disease.²³

Benjamin Wade of Ohio

A Neglected Radical

Benjamin Wade is often neglected in histories of the Senate, due in part to a critical vote he cast in 1868, but this Ohio senator was an influential member of the Senate during the era of Civil War and Reconstruction. Born in Massachusetts in 1800, Wade was the self-educated son of an impoverished farmer. At 18 years of age, he traveled west—on foot—to Ohio, where he labored on what became the Ohio and Erie Canal. Through sheer determination, Wade read law and passed the bar. By the 1840s, he was a successful lawyer with political ambitions. He joined the Senate in 1851.

Coming to the Senate in the 1850s was a bit like jumping into the mouth of an active volcano, but the blunt and often antagonistic Wade fit right in. He supported internal improvements, homestead laws, and female suffrage, but his principal concern was the abolition of slavery. When Congress passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, allowing for the

possible expansion of slavery into western territories, Wade was among the senators who denounced that legislation. Following the vicious beating of Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner by a proslavery representative in 1856, Wade began carrying a specially made walking stick that included a hidden rifle. Each day, he laid that stick across his Senate Chamber desk in defiance of anyone who might abuse him.²⁴

During the Civil War, following Union defeats at Bull Run and Ball's Bluff, Congress established the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War to investigate the management of the war by the executive branch. With Wade as chairman, the Joint Committee expanded its mission beyond military operations to investigate issues such as the mistreatment of military prisoners and the massacre of Native Americans. Foremost among the legacies of the committee are the many volumes of reports it issued between



"Hon. B.F. Wade Awaiting the Senate Hour, in the Vice-President's Room, in the Capitol, Washington, D.C.," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, April 18, 1868. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

1861 and 1865, establishing a comprehensive documentary record of wartime activities.²⁵

When it came to Reconstruction policy, Wade was often at odds with the more moderate President Abraham Lincoln. In 1863 Lincoln proposed allowing seceded states to return if 10 percent of the voters took a loyalty oath. Wade countered with his own proposal. Co-authored with Maryland representative Henry Davis, the Wade-Davis bill provided for the readmission of rebel states only with complete abolition of slavery and only if a majority of voters signed an ironclad loyalty oath. Congress approved

the Wade-Davis bill, but Lincoln pocket vetoed it.²⁶

Wade was optimistic when Andrew Johnson succeeded to the presidency in 1865. "By the gods, there will be no trouble now in running the government," he proclaimed, but Johnson's policies echoed those of Lincoln, not the Radicals. Before long, Wade called for impeachment of the president. When Johnson was impeached, the Ohio senator faced a unique problem. He had been elected president pro tempore. At the time, when the vice presidency was vacant, the president pro tempore was next in line to become president. When Wade voted to convict Johnson, he also voted to place himself in the presidency. The efforts to remove Johnson "turned out a complete failure," the *Boston Globe* later explained, "and among those who were dreadfully disappointed was Ben Wade." Therein we find a key reason for Wade's

scholarly neglect, never mind the fact that by the time Wade cast his vote, acquittal of the president was already certain. As his biographer noted, Wade voted regardless of the "rule of decency which prohibits a man from casting a ballot in his own behalf." From that moment on, every action he took, past or present, was suspect.²⁷

Yet, Ben Wade was much more than a political opportunist. Motivated by a sincere belief in the morality of abolition and the necessity of racial justice, Wade, as his biographer conceded, was "an intrepid fighter for human freedom."²⁸

Hiram Revels of Mississippi

The First African American Senator

On a February day in 1870, visitors to the Senate Chamber burst into applause as Mississippi's newly elected senator entered the room. Hiram Revels was about to become the first African American member of the United States Congress.

Hiram Revels was born a free man in Fayetteville, North Carolina, on September 27, 1827, the son of a Baptist preacher. Denied an education in North Carolina, where teaching African American children was illegal, Revels secretly took lessons from an African American woman, then traveled north to further his education. He attended seminaries in Indiana and Ohio and studied at Knox College in Illinois. He became a minister of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1845. While preaching in various states during the turbulent 1850s, Revels surreptitiously assisted fugitive slaves. He was serving as a pastor in Baltimore when the Civil War began in 1861. He helped to organize regiments of African American soldiers in Maryland and established schools for freed slaves in Missouri. In 1864 he became a Union army chaplain in Mississippi. At war's end, he settled in Natchez where he served as presiding elder of the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1868 he gained his first elected position, as alderman, and entered state politics the next year.²⁹

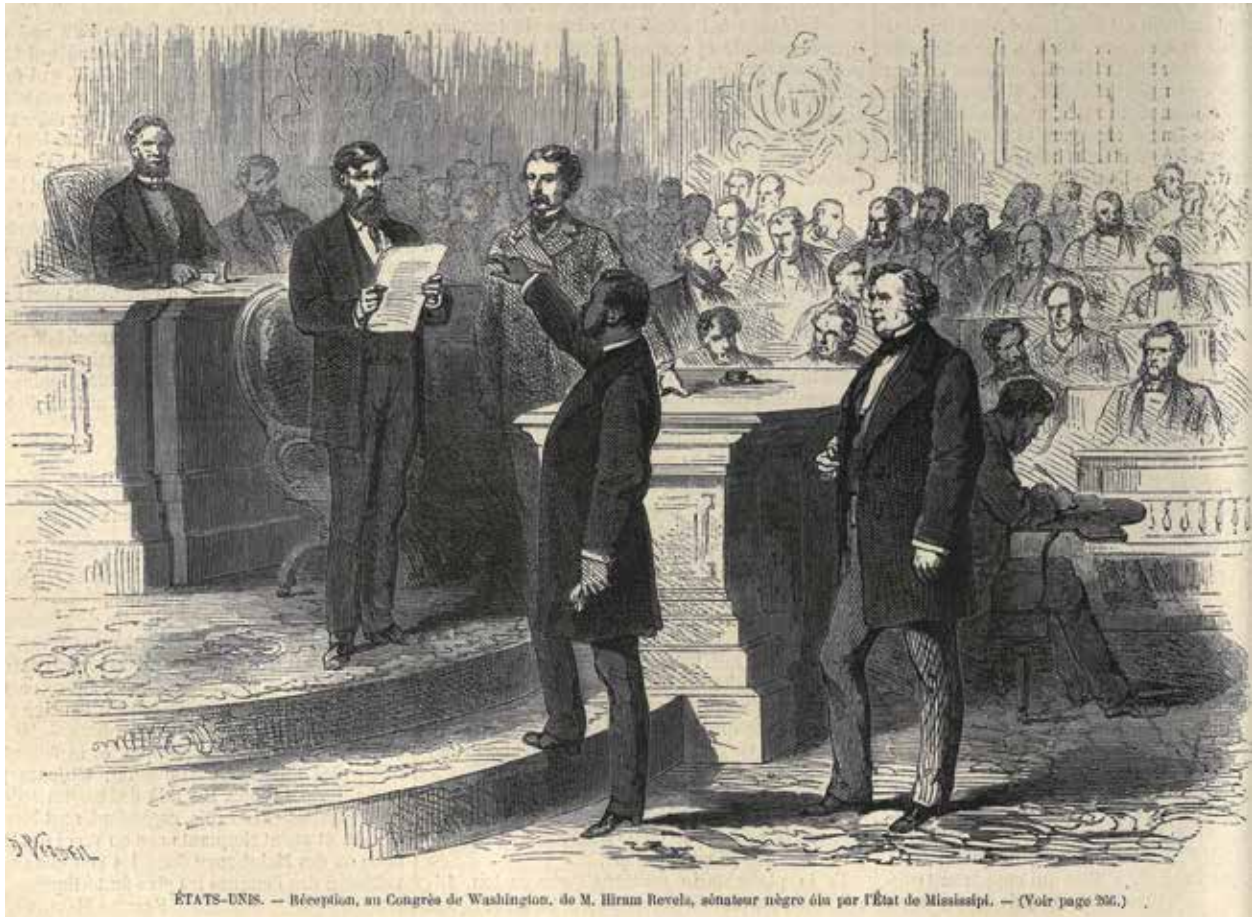
In 1870, as Mississippi sought readmission to representation in the U.S. Congress, the Republican



Senator Hiram Revels. Library of Congress.

Party firmly controlled both houses of Congress and also dominated the southern state legislatures. That, along with ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, set the stage for election of Congress's first African American members. When the time came to fill Mississippi's seats in the Senate, vacant since 1861, the state legislature chose Hiram Revels for one seat and former Union general Adelbert Ames for the other.

Mississippi gained readmission on February 23, 1870, and the Senate prepared to accept its two new senators. Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, one of the



Hiram Revels takes the oath of office in the Senate Chamber, February 25, 1870. *L'illustration: Journal Universel*, April 9, 1870.

Senate's strongest civil rights advocates, presented Revels's credentials to the Senate. Immediately, three senators issued a challenge. They charged that Revels had not been a U.S. citizen for the constitutionally required nine years. Citing the 1857 Dred Scott Supreme Court decision, they argued that Revels did not gain citizenship until at least 1866, with passage of that year's civil rights act, and perhaps not until the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified in 1868. By this logic, Revels could claim a citizenship lasting, at best, four years. Revels and his supporters dismissed the challenge. The Fourteenth Amendment had repealed the Dred Scott decision, they insisted, pointing out that long before 1866 Revels had voted in the state of Ohio. Certainly, that qualified him as a citizen. The debate ended with an impassioned

plea from Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner. "What we do today is not . . . for ourselves," Sumner proclaimed. "[It] is for all . . . who suffer from tyranny and wrong . . . ; for all . . . who feel the blight of unjust power; it is for all mankind." The Senate then voted 48 to 8 to seat Hiram Revels.³⁰

Escorted to the well of the Chamber by Senator Wilson, Revels took the oath of office on February 25, 1870. Since he was filling a vacancy, Revels's term was brief, lasting barely a year, but he made good use of his time in office, becoming a vocal opponent of racial segregation and fighting against efforts to undermine the civil and political rights of African Americans. Like all pioneers, the importance of Revels's service lived on, opening doors for others to follow.³¹

Blanche Bruce of Mississippi

The Man Between

On February 14, 1879, a senator from Mississippi presided over the Senate. Ordinarily, that would not be worth mentioning—routine Senate business—but in this particular instance, it was historic. The senator who assumed that duty had a personal history unlike any other senator. He had been born into slavery.³²

Blanche Bruce was born on March 1, 1841, near Farmville, Virginia. Although born enslaved, his experience with that tragic institution was not typical. The son of an enslaved woman and most likely her white master, Bruce became a favorite of the master and a servant and playmate to the master's son. Bruce once referred to himself as a "plantation pet." As such, he was given opportunities denied to most enslaved boys, including an education. From his earliest years, therefore, Blanche Bruce was "the man between"—between two races, between slavery and freedom, between opposing political factions—making his rise to political prominence even more remarkable.³³

When the Civil War began in 1861, the 20-year-old Bruce left his master's plantation and fled to freedom in the new state of Kansas. "I decided to emancipate myself," he later explained. "I worked



Blanche Kelso Bruce, by Simmie Lee Knox, 2001. U.S. Senate Collection.

myself to Kansas and became a free man." Over the course of a decade, Bruce roamed from place to place, job to job, as he sought further education and better professional opportunities. When Reconstruction brought readmission of Southern states, he traveled south, reaching Mississippi in 1869. He arrived in the state without a job, with few prospects, and with only 75 cents in his pocket. Inspired by a speech delivered by gubernatorial candidate James L. Alcorn, Bruce became politically active.³⁴

For a brief period in the post-Civil War years, Mississippi was a land of opportunity for young Black men. Land was cheap, jobs were plenty, and the large African American population was gaining political power. Bruce attended rallies, spoke to candidates, and became a familiar face at political functions, quickly rising through various state political offices. But, once again, he found himself as the man between.³⁵

Two powerhouses in Mississippi politics were battling for control of the state's political machine: James Alcorn, governor turned U.S. senator, and fellow senator Adelbert Ames. Both men had supported Bruce as he built a political career, but as they came to personify the growing split in the southern Republican Party, a division that by the late 1870s would undermine the party's strength and allow for a resurgence of conservative Democrats, Bruce was stuck in the middle, torn between the man who inspired him to enter politics—Alcorn—and the man whose more radical brand of republicanism—Ames—offered African Americans their best opportunities. As the two men vied for the governorship in 1873, Bruce chose to support Ames, alienating Alcorn.

On February 4, 1874, the Mississippi state legislature elected Bruce to fill the seat in the U.S. Senate once occupied by Ames. During his single term in the Senate, from 1875 to 1881, Bruce advocated for civil rights for African Americans. In his maiden speech, he offered an eloquent defense of voting rights. At stake were “the political rights of the people and the free institutions of the country,” he proclaimed. Black citizens “must be guaranteed . . . the . . . exercise of honest convictions” and be “protected in the use of [the] ballot.” Bruce also promoted fair treatment for Native Americans, opposed exclusion of Chinese immigrants, and called for a desegregated army. He promoted a legislative agenda that included better navigation on the Mississippi River and flood control projects. Perhaps most important, he led the investigation into the failed Freedman's Savings Bank that had cost Black depositors thousands of dollars.³⁶

Blanche Bruce lived in a country deeply segregated by race and divided by ever-shifting political ideologies, but he bridged the gap between Black and White, in politics and in society. Perhaps no moment better personified that achievement than when, on February 14, 1879, this formerly enslaved man took hold of the gavel and presided over the Senate.³⁷

William Allison of Iowa

The Cautious Boss

William Allison of Iowa was born in a log cabin near Perry, Ohio, in 1829. He taught school, studied law, and opened a law practice. In 1854, when the Kansas-Nebraska Act split political parties into battling factions, Allison became one of the first men in Ohio to join the emerging alliance of Free Soil Democrats and antislavery

Whigs who established the Republican Party. From that time on, Allison's political career progressed in partnership with the Grand Old Party. In 1855 he served as a delegate to Ohio's first Republican convention. By 1860 he had moved to Iowa, settling near Dubuque. That year, he served as the state representative at the national Republican convention.

Allison's congressional career began in the U.S. House of Representatives during the Civil War. By the time he moved to the Senate in 1873, he had gained a reputation as a leading expert on national economic policy. He became chairman of the Appropriations Committee in 1881, a position he held for nearly 25 years. Also serving on the Finance Committee, Allison forged legislation responsive to the leading issues of the day—promotion of the railroad industry, a protective tariff, and “hard-money” currency.

By the 1880s, the Republican Party had matured into a strong political force, and William Allison became Iowa's de facto political boss. Twice, he narrowly missed winning the Republican presidential nomination. He rejected offers by three Republican presidents to become secretary of the treasury. He even turned down President William McKinley's offer of the vice presidency, preferring to remain in the Senate. In the 1890s, before the development of formal party floor leaders, Allison became chair of the Republican Conference and was a member of an elite group known as the “Senate Four”—a quartet of powerful senators who all but controlled Senate action for the better part of a decade.³⁸

Quiet and cautious by nature, it was said that Allison could “walk on piano keys” from Des Moines to Washington “without ever striking a note.” But his quiet demeanor didn't keep him from becoming a Senate powerhouse with far-reaching influence over national policy. “The great measures to which . . . his name was attached would be an imposing list,” wrote fellow senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, “and if we were to add . . . those in which he had a large, shaping, and even controlling part, it would fill pages.”³⁹

When Allison died in office in 1908, having served in the Senate for nearly 36 years, he was



Senator William Allison, by V. Hugh Campbell, 1904. Library of Congress.

considered one of the most influential men on Capitol Hill, although he never made such claims for himself and preferred to work quietly behind the scenes. “Mr. Allison's fame,” explained Lodge, “rests securely . . . upon his steady work done day by day, quietly, diligently, thoroughly, without the glare of headlines.” If the highest praise is to be called “a good senator,” Lodge concluded, then, tried by that exacting test, “Mr. Allison was our best Senator.”⁴⁰

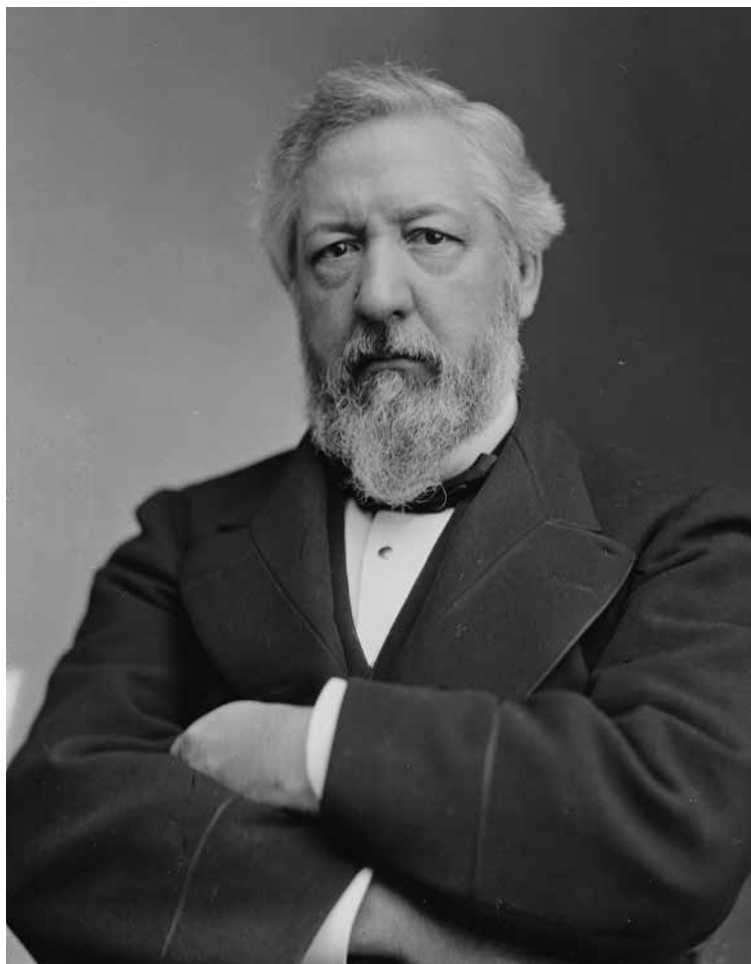
James Blaine of Maine

The Magnetic Man

Some called him the Plumed Knight. Others referred to him as the Magnetic Man of Maine. His critics labeled him the Tattoo'd Villain of the Gilded Age. By any name, James Blaine was one of the leading statesmen of the late 19th century.

Born in Pennsylvania on January 31, 1830, James Blaine moved to Maine in 1854 and became a successful newspaper editor. Elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1862, Blaine shaped Civil War-era legislation and influenced post-war Reconstruction policy. By the time he became Speaker of the House in 1869, he was one of the Republican Party's most prominent public figures. More than any other politician of his time, wrote one biographer, "Blaine seemed to symbolize the success . . . of the Republican Party." But that success also produced enemies. As supporters promoted him for a presidential bid, referring to him as the "Plumed Knight" who would lead them to victory, Blaine's critics charged him with financial misconduct. The accusations were exaggerated, but the damage was done. Blaine lost the 1876 nomination to Rutherford B. Hayes.⁴¹

Instead, Blaine took a seat in the Senate, and before long he had gained a new nickname, the "Magnetic Man." Blaine used his knowledge of economics to pursue tariff reform and establish reciprocal trade agreements that foreshadowed the policies of the



Senator James Blaine. Library of Congress.

20th century. In particular, he called for commercial expansion in Latin America, at that time an untapped market for U.S. goods. Blaine's Pan-American policies were part of a broader imperialistic agenda, but they also were grounded in sound economic theory. It was commercial development, he believed, not unbridled territorial expansion, that would best promote U.S. interests.⁴²

By 1880 Senator Blaine seemed destined for the presidency, but his splintered party got in the



"Phryne Before the Chicago Tribunal," by Bernhard Gillam, *Puck*, June 4, 1884. Library of Congress.

way. One faction, the Republican "stalwarts," hoped to maintain the old spoils system of patronage by bringing back Ulysses S. Grant, while another faction known as "half breed" Republicans called for civil service reform. They backed James Blaine. At the convention, the party was so divided that the delegates remained deadlocked after 35 ballots. Finally, on the 36th ballot and with Blaine's support, the half breeds promoted a compromise candidate named James Garfield. As a consolation prize, President Garfield appointed James Blaine as secretary of state.⁴³

Four years later, following Garfield's assassination and three lackluster years under President Chester A. Arthur, the drive to put James Blaine in the White House seemed unstoppable. Blaine stirred such ardent devotion among his supporters that they became known as "Blainiacs." He easily gained the

GOP nomination, but defeating the Democratic candidate, Grover Cleveland, proved to be more difficult. Stirring up old charges of corruption, cartoonists depicted Blaine as a discredited "Tattoo'd Man," a pitiful figure covered with tattoos listing his alleged crimes. He soon faced opposition from yet another faction within his own party, an insurgent group of "good government" reformers known as the "mugwumps." On Election Day, the mugwumps bolted the party, supported Grover Cleveland, and Blaine went down in defeat.⁴⁴

History texts often dismiss James Blaine as a presidential "also ran," but that ignores his important role as senator and legislator. The generally tarnished reputation of the Senate's Gilded Age also has tainted his legacy, but James Blaine was a powerful senator and a skilled legislator whose influence shaped U.S. economic policies well into the 20th century.⁴⁵

Francis Warren of Wyoming

A Political Baron of the West

Who was the last Union veteran to serve in the Senate? The answer is Francis Warren of Wyoming. He entered the war as an 18-year-old volunteer in the Massachusetts 49th Regiment, and 67 years later Senator Warren died in office at age 85.⁴⁶

Born in Massachusetts on June 20, 1844, Warren served in the Union army. At the 1863 Siege of Port Hudson, Louisiana, he earned the Congressional Medal of Honor for disabling a Confederate artillery that destroyed most of his platoon. After the war, he settled in Cheyenne, still a boom town in the Dakota Territory. Over the next two decades, Warren became an ambitious but usually genial baron of Wyoming's cattle and sheep industry. He also gained substantial interests in the Cheyenne and Northern Railroad and the Brush-Swan Electric Company, which supplied Cheyenne with its first electric power. Along the way, he became Wyoming's most ardent promoter. To discuss the history of Wyoming without mentioning Warren, one biographer noted, "would be as unsatisfying as the play of 'Hamlet' with the character Hamlet omitted!"⁴⁷

While building this empire, Warren also pursued a political career as mayor of Cheyenne, as territorial governor, and as Wyoming's first state governor in 1890. That same year, the state legislature sent him to the U.S. Senate. He was headed for an easy reelection in 1892 when the legendary Johnson County War altered the political playing field. That conflict pitted land barons against cattle rustlers and small-settlement ranchers. When the U.S. Cavalry rode in to save the barons from certain defeat, many suspected that Senator Warren was behind the raid. The legal

and political storm that followed cost him his Senate seat—but not for long. Two years later, Warren returned to the Senate and served another 35 years. His personal interests were inextricably linked to those of Wyoming, and he championed policies vital to the state's development, particularly land reclamation and irrigation projects. As one historian noted, "Warren went into public life to further two [related] objectives: . . . his own enrichment; and the development of Wyoming."⁴⁸

Warren left his mark on the Senate in other ways, too. In 1906 the Wyoming senator appointed Leona Wells to a top clerical job for the Committee



Senator Francis Warren. Library of Congress.

on Military Affairs, one of the earliest women to hold such a position. Five years later, newspaper reporters identified her as “Uncle Sam’s Highest Salaried Woman.” Warren also led the way in hiring African American staff. While serving as chairman of the Appropriations Committee in the 1920s, he appointed Robert Ogle to the committee staff. Ogle is believed to be the first African American to serve on the Senate’s professional committee staff.⁴⁹

In 1928 Warren became the first senator to surpass 36 years of service—a record that held for another 40 years. He died on November 24, 1929. His funeral service in the Senate Chamber brought to the Capitol the president, the chief justice, members of Congress, and some aging Civil War veterans. Among those bidding a final farewell to this old Union vet was 88-year-old representative Charles Stedman of North Carolina, Congress’s last veteran of the Confederacy.⁵⁰

Walter George of Georgia

The Sage of Finance

Walter George of Georgia is not a well-known figure today, but when he retired in 1957, after nearly 35 years in the Senate, George was a nationally known figure who had exercised tremendous influence on American policy, foreign and domestic.

Born near Preston, Georgia, on January 29, 1878, the son of a tenant farmer, Walter George was so interested in politics that he received the *Congressional Record* in his daily mail. Young Walter pored over every issue of the *Record*, memorizing and then reciting long speeches to the delight of hometown crowds. “The Congressional style was ponderous in those days,” he later commented, “but I learned to like it.” He studied law at Mercer University. Admitted to the bar in 1901, he established a practice in Vienna, Georgia, and won every case he argued. He was so successful, one biographer noted, that by 1906 the “other lawyers were selling insurance on the side to supplement their income.” He quickly advanced to district court judge, then to the state court of appeals, and in 1917 he took a seat on the Georgia Supreme Court.⁵¹



Senator Walter George. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

In 1922 Walter George gained national attention. He was elected to the U.S. Senate on November 7, but it was the circumstances under which he took the oath of office that put him in the spotlight. On October 3, 1922, the governor of Georgia had appointed Rebecca Felton to fill a vacant seat, thereby making her the first woman to serve in the Senate. At the time, the Senate was not in session, so Felton had no opportunity to take the oath of office in the Senate Chamber. When George was elected to that seat and the Senate subsequently returned to business on November 20, George astutely delayed presenting his credentials to allow Felton to be sworn in and serve in an official capacity for another 24 hours. Clearly, Walter George possessed good political instincts!⁵²

As senator, George was a steadfast southern conservative in an era of segregation. While supporting programs that brought economic benefits to his state, he vehemently opposed civil rights legislation, including anti-lynching bills, and served as a principal strategist for southern segregationists in the Senate. He gained additional notoriety in 1938 when he became a target of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's infamous "purge" of Democrats who did not support New Deal policies. George had backed programs like the Tennessee Valley Authority and Social Security, which brought assistance to depression-era Georgia, but the conservative Democrat remained skeptical of Roosevelt's broader agenda and vigorously opposed the president's plan to expand the Supreme Court in 1937. Roosevelt, frustrated with this opposition from within his own political party, vowed to use the 1938 midterm election to purge from Congress conservative Democrats like George. On August 11, 1938, the president addressed a large crowd in Barnesville, Georgia. With the unsuspecting senator seated behind him, Roosevelt referred to George as "a gentleman and a scholar" but insisted that the senator be voted out of



"There's Not Going to Be Much Left of the Patient," by Clifford Berryman, June 10, 1943, depicting Senator George, left, and President Roosevelt, right, removing money from a taxpayer, illustrating rising taxes in wartime. Library of Congress.

office. "Mr. President," George said calmly as he took the podium, "I accept the challenge." Walter George easily won reelection.⁵³

Any remaining hostility from that incident was soon overshadowed by wartime concerns. As chairman of the Finance Committee from 1941 to 1947, George worked closely with Roosevelt and then President Harry S. Truman to finance the war effort and plan the post-war economy. By the early 1950s, George was known as America's "Sage of Finance." Later, he turned his attention to foreign policy and won even stronger praise as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee during the years of the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration. It was George who proposed the Geneva Summit in 1955 to address the issues of the Cold War.⁵⁴

By 1956 Walter George had reached the pinnacle of his power, but a new generation of politicians was rising. For the first time in his long career, George faced a serious electoral challenge—from Herman Talmadge. Rather than endure a bruising intraparty fight, George retired on January 3, 1957. He died seven months later, on August 4, 1957.⁵⁵

George Norris of Nebraska

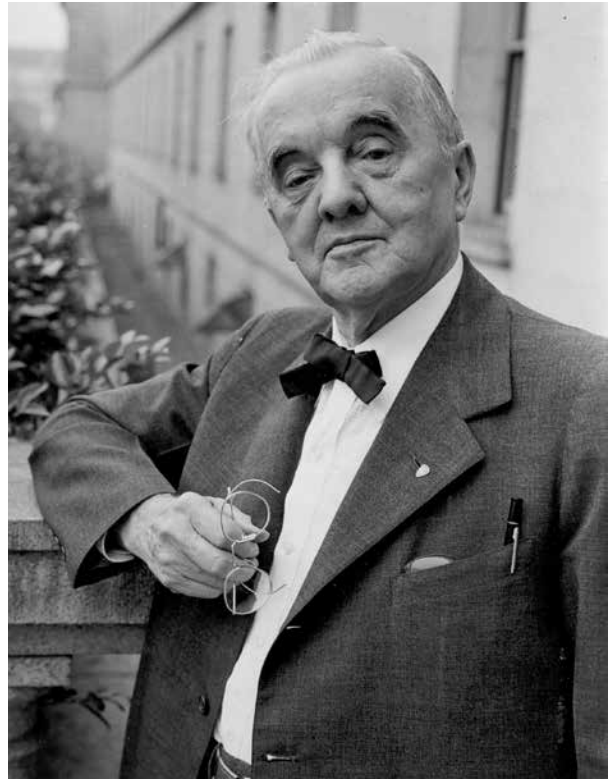
The Almost Famous Senator

On March 12, 1959, a festive crowd of senators and other dignitaries gathered in the Capitol's ornate Senate Reception Room to witness the induction of five noteworthy senators into a senatorial "hall of fame." Choosing the senators who became known as the "Famous Five" had not been an easy task. Who could qualify for such an honor?

The Special Committee on the Senate Reception Room, chaired by Massachusetts senator John Kennedy, had decided to avoid the word "great" in making its selections. Instead, the committee opted to name five senators whose acts of "statesmanship transcend[ed] party and state lines." Nonetheless, choosing five senators from the more than 1,500 individuals who already had served in the Senate was a daunting task. At one point, Kennedy quipped that sports writers choosing entrants to the Baseball Hall of Fame had it easy by comparison.⁵⁶

To aid in selection, the committee turned to scholars, who helped to narrow the list to 65. Who topped that list? George Norris, the progressive senator from Nebraska. He got 87 votes from the scholars and even beat out Henry Clay, who came in second with 86. Norris also had strong support among senators. Paul Douglas of Illinois proclaimed that Norris had been "incorruptible, persistent . . . and unselfish." Alabama's Lister Hill described him as "the embodiment of integrity, courage . . . and statesmanship." So, you might ask, what happened? Why wasn't George Norris's portrait included in the Famous Five?⁵⁷

Certainly, no one would deny Norris's importance to congressional history. As a young member of the U.S. House of Representatives, he led a revolt against the powerful Speaker Joseph Cannon that resulted



Senator George Norris. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

in major institutional reform. During his 30 years in the Senate, the independent-minded Nebraskan championed the direct election of senators, proposed the Lane Duck Amendment to the Constitution, and spearheaded creation of the Tennessee Valley Authority. When Norris left office in 1943 and died a year later, many believed the nation had lost one of its greatest statesmen.⁵⁸

But George Norris also had some powerful enemies, and some of them were still in the Senate in the 1950s. Styles Bridges, for example, the influential senator from New Hampshire, hated Norris. He had battled the cagey Nebraskan on a number of issues and usually lost. Virginia's Willis Robertson

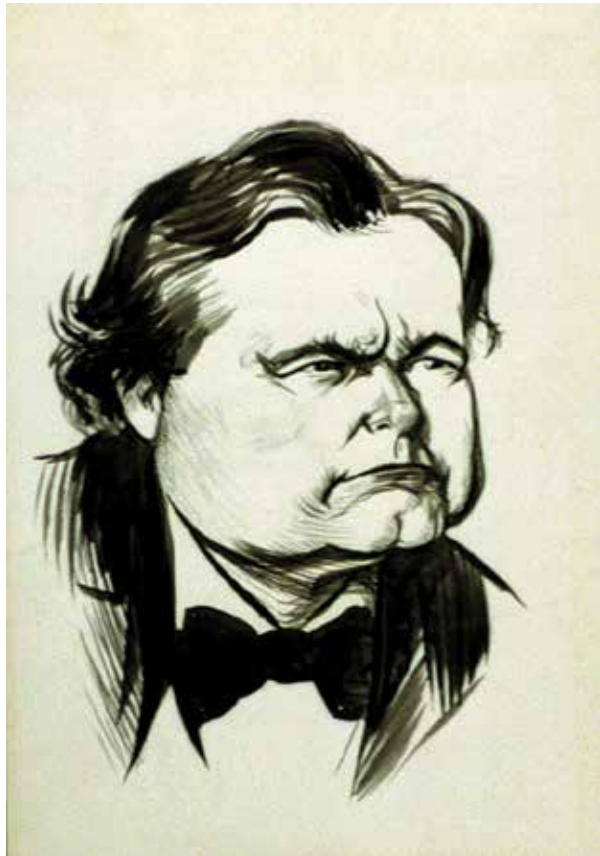
complained about Norris's famous streak of independence. He "had no fixed Party allegiance," Robertson complained. He would run under any "banner that gave promise of political success." These senators threatened to filibuster any attempt to include Norris in the collection.⁵⁹

George Norris enjoyed a long and noteworthy career marked by major legislative achievements. He had the support of scholars and most of the Senate. He was undoubtedly famous. But thanks to old political feuds, George Norris never became one of the Famous Five.

William Borah of Idaho

The Great Opposer

During his Senate career, William Borah earned the title of "the Great Opposer." Independent, irascible, often at odds with



Senator William Borah, by Arthur Garfield Dove. Library of Congress.

his colleagues, Borah was a vocal critic of special interests, an ardent defender of the Constitution and its system of checks and balances, and one of the Senate's most skilled orators. Today, he is best remembered for his influence on American foreign policy.⁶⁰

Elected to the Senate in 1907, William Borah championed many Progressive Era causes, including a constitutional amendment to establish direct election of senators, but his most dedicated efforts were aimed at keeping the nation free of entangling alliances. Borah was a strict isolationist. His influence was quite evident in 1919 when he played a key role in defeating the Treaty of Versailles, thereby blocking U.S. participation in the League of Nations.⁶¹

On April 4, 1917, Borah had joined his Senate colleagues—somewhat reluctantly—in approving a declaration of war against Germany. He then worked diligently to keep wartime alliances from becoming permanent. Two years later, while President Woodrow Wilson negotiated the peace treaty in Paris, Borah appealed for independence. "America has arisen to a position where she is respected and admired," he told one audience. "She did it by minding her own business."⁶²

The Treaty of Versailles arrived in the Senate in July of 1919. Senate Democrats were nearly unified in their support for Wilson's treaty, but the Republican caucus was divided. The "reservationists," led by Massachusetts senator Henry Cabot Lodge, called for approval of the treaty only if its controversial proposal for a League of Nations was altered by reservations. The "irreconcilables," led by Borah, opposed the treaty in any form.⁶³

The Senate endured a grueling four-month debate over the treaty and its proposed international covenant, culminating in a dramatic roll-call vote on November 19, 1919. On that final day of debate, Borah delivered an impassioned speech. "My objections to the league have not been met by the reservations," he stated to his colleagues. "We have entangled ourselves with all European concerns . . . We have forfeited and surrendered, once and for all, the great policy of 'no entangling alliances' . . . Would you purchase peace at the cost of any part of our independence?"⁶⁴

Borah's eloquent plea moved Henry Cabot Lodge to tears, while others declared it an oratorical masterpiece. Then, with Borah's words still echoing in the Chamber, the clerk called the roll. As expected, Republicans split their vote. Lodge and the reservationists voted in favor of the now altered treaty. Borah and the irreconcilables voted no. Ironically, most Senate Democrats—at the urging

of an angry president—also voted no, rejecting any attempt by the Senate to alter Wilson's treaty by reservations. The Treaty of Versailles went down to defeat.⁶⁵

William Borah served another 21 years in the Senate, becoming an architect of neutrality laws in the 1930s. When he died in office in 1940, eulogists described him as fearless and forceful, but after 1941 other words appeared, such as naive or misguided. Would the attack on Pearl Harbor and a second world war have transformed Borah's isolationism, as it did many others? We'll never know. One thing is certain—the Great Opposer remains an important figure in Senate history and a lasting reminder that in the Senate, every voice can be heard.



Senator William Borah. Library of Congress.

Carl Hayden of Arizona

The Senate's Work Horse

Carl Hayden was born in the Arizona Territory in 1877, the son of a pioneering rancher and mill owner who founded the town of Hayden's Ferry, later named Tempe, in the Salt River Valley. The young Carl loved reading history and so enjoyed reciting great political speeches that his mother nicknamed him "the senator" and told friends, "Someday [Carl] will be the greatest man in the U.S. Senate." Ironically, Hayden did become a great senator, but he wasn't known for his speeches!⁶⁶

Carl Hayden enjoyed an adventurous childhood, including solo horseback journeys to the Grand Canyon and Mexico City, then attended Stanford University and returned home to run the family business. First elected to public office in 1902, he rose to prominence after 1906 as the gun-toting sheriff of Maricopa County. In 1910 he famously captured a fleeing band of train robbers by pursuing them first in a railcar, then on horseback, and finally by commandeering an Apperson-Jackrabbit automobile, which he rode on the rail lines to gain speed. That exploit helped him win his first election to the U.S. Congress.⁶⁷

Arizona became the 48th state on February 14, 1912. Five days later, Carl Hayden became the state's first U.S. representative. He arrived in Washington in boots and a cowboy hat. Within a month he delivered his maiden speech, which prompted an unexpected rebuke from an older colleague. "You just couldn't hold it in, could you? You had to make a speech," scolded the old-timer. "Now it will go into the *Congressional Record*. You can't ever take it back." That day, Hayden received a piece of advice that he followed and often repeated. "If you want to get your name in the papers, be a show horse. But if you want to gain the respect of your colleagues, be a work horse."⁶⁸



Representative and later Senator Carl Hayden. Library of Congress.

After eight terms in the House, Hayden easily won election to the Senate in 1926. Heeding that early advice, he rarely spoke in the Chamber and became known as the "silent senator," but his behind-the-scenes power and influence became legendary. He steered many bills to passage, including the law establishing the Grand Canyon National Park, but his proudest achievement was the Central Arizona Project, a water management plan that he nurtured from proposal in 1947 to enactment in 1968. He chaired the

Appropriations Committee for 14 years, becoming—in Lyndon B. Johnson’s words—the “third senator from every state.” In return, senators provided him with crucial votes. A pundit once commented that senators would “vote landlocked Arizona a navy if [Carl Hayden] asked for it.”⁶⁹

On February 19, 1962, Hayden became the first person to reach 50 years of service in Congress. That record grew to 56 years by the time he retired in 1969 at age 91 and remained unbroken for 40 years. Many people wondered how the quiet Hayden lasted so long and wielded so much power. The *New York Times* attributed

his success to the combination of an “an old-shoe personality; devotion to quiet, hard work; uncanny political sagacity; dedication to Senate traditions, and a remarkable ability to make and keep friends.”⁷⁰

Hayden’s colleagues certainly understood the scope of his influence. Another Arizona senator, Barry Goldwater, once remarked that if you could get Hayden’s support on a bill, you were halfway home. Hayden was often asked how he managed to do so much while saying so little. Typically laconic, he replied, “When you’ve got the votes, you don’t have to talk.”⁷¹

Gladys Pyle of South Dakota Pioneering for Women in Politics

When studying women senators, we often learn about Rebecca Felton of Georgia who became the first female senator in 1922, or Hattie Caraway of Arkansas who became the first woman elected to the Senate 10 years later. Any such study quickly turns to Maine’s Margaret Chase Smith, the first woman to serve in both houses of the U.S. Congress. Other than those three, however, the Senate’s earliest female members are often dismissed as placeholders—typically widows appointed to fill seats left vacant by the death of their senatorial husbands. That description ignores a remarkable woman from South Dakota named Gladys Pyle.

Born in Huron, South Dakota, in 1890, Gladys Pyle attended the American Conservatory of Music and the University of Chicago. She became an educator and lectured for the League of Women Voters. Turning to politics, she quickly advanced in state government, piling up a number of record-breaking “firsts.” In

1922 she became the first woman to serve in the South Dakota state legislature, where she was described as “level headed and self-possessed.” In fact, wrote one reporter, she was “an ideal legislator.” Four years later, Pyle took office as the first woman to serve as South Dakota’s secretary of state. In 1930 she set her sights on the governor’s office and won the popular vote over four male candidates. She failed to gain the 35 percent required by state law, however, and a special all-male convention gave the prize to one of her competitors.⁷²

By 1938 Pyle was well known in South Dakota, and that year’s midterm election gave her a unique opportunity. Senator Peter Norbeck had died in 1936 and an appointed senator held the seat until the 1938 general election. As that election approached, Republican nominee John (Chan) Gurney was favored to win, but his term would not begin until January, leaving South Dakota with only one senator from November until the new Congress began on January



Senator Gladys Pyle. Library of Congress.

3, 1939. Ordinarily, this would not have been a problem since the Senate had adjourned sine die and was not expected to return until January. As the election approached, however, it looked increasingly likely that the Democrats would lose seats in both houses of Congress, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt was threatening to call a special lame-duck session to take advantage of his current Democratic majority. South Dakota's GOP officials insisted on a special election to fill the brief term to keep the state fully represented. They chose Gladys Pyle to run for the short term.

On November 9, 1938, Pyle added two more "firsts" to her list—the first woman to represent South Dakota in the U.S. Senate and the first Republican woman to become a U.S. senator. Was her service merely symbolic? Despite his threats, Roosevelt did not call Congress back and Pyle never took the oath in

open session, but that did not stop her from assuming senatorial duties. Soon after the election, Pyle drove to Washington, D.C., set up an office, and spent the next five weeks as South Dakota's junior senator. Many in the press corps viewed it as a stunt. "Miss Pyle is getting a great vacation at government expense," carped one reporter, but Pyle earned her small salary. During her short term, she championed highway projects, promoted Works Progress Administration (WPA) programs, investigated a sale of land inside a state park, and aided Native Americans seeking mortgage assistance.

On January 3, 1939, Chan Gurney took the seat, bringing Pyle's term to an end. Her Senate career was short, but productive; brief, but pathbreaking. Much more than a placeholder, Gladys Pyle kept on pioneering for South Dakota women until her death in 1989, at the age of 98.⁷³

Dennis Chavez of New Mexico

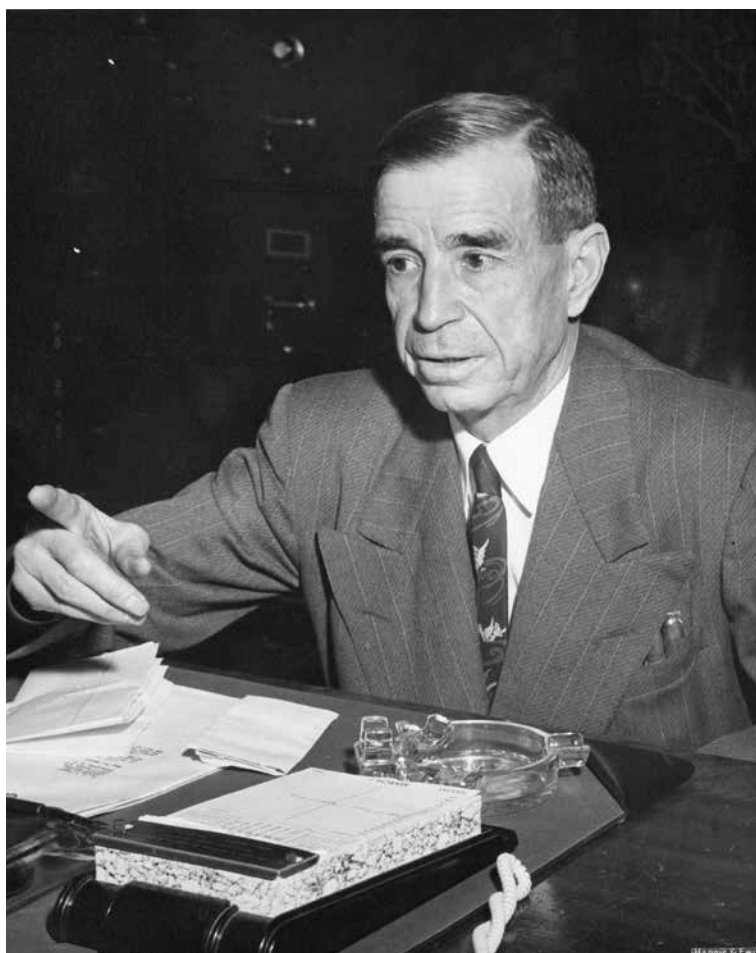
El Senador

“I have been fighting for the . . . underprivileged all my days, because I was one of them,” explained Senator Dennis Chavez of New Mexico. Chavez was not the first Hispanic American to serve in the Senate, but his 31 years of public service, including 27 years in the Senate, deserve attention.

Born in 1888 in a dirt-floored adobe house, Chavez’s childhood was marked by poverty and hard work. His family settled in Albuquerque, where they eked out a meager living. At age 13, he dropped out of school to support his family. By the time New Mexico became a state in 1912, the young Chavez, already imbued with a strong social conscience, was turning to politics. In 1916 he supported the Senate campaign of Andrieus Jones. When Jones won that race, Chavez was rewarded with a job as a Senate clerk. He worked on Capitol Hill during the day and attended evening law classes at Georgetown University. He earned his law degree in 1920, returned to New Mexico, opened a law practice, and became active in state politics. In 1934 Chavez ran a long-shot campaign in a Senate race against a powerful incumbent, Bronson Cutting, losing by a mere 1,200 votes. When Cutting died in an airplane crash in 1935, the governor appointed Chavez to the seat—a seat he held until his death in 1962.⁷⁴

Senator Chavez promoted ambitious public works programs. He secured

funding for the construction of new post offices in New Mexico, modernized country roads prone to flooding during summer rains, and brought telephone service to remote corners of his state. Working closely with Carl Hayden of Arizona, he also gained congressional support for major reclamation projects throughout the arid west. Chavez also ensured that the Southwest received its share of Cold War defense spending. He used his chairmanship of the defense appropriations subcommittee to promote air and missile power, develop the



Senator Dennis Chavez. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

White Sands Proving Grounds, and establish the Walker, Kirtland, and Cannon Air Force Bases. Under Chavez's watch, Albuquerque-based Sandia National Laboratories became one of the nation's preeminent nuclear defense research facilities.⁷⁵

Throughout his Senate career, Chavez championed civil rights and civil liberties. In 1950 he joined Maine senator Margaret Chase Smith to become one of the first senators to denounce the tactics of Wisconsin senator Joseph McCarthy, who relentlessly and fruitlessly pursued Communists in government agencies. "It matters little if the Congress appropriates hundreds of millions of dollars to check the erosion of the soil," Chavez argued, "if we permit the erosion of our civil liberties, free institutions, and the untrammelled pursuit of truth."⁷⁶

As the only Hispanic member of the Senate, Chavez routinely challenged discrimination and doggedly proposed making permanent the World War II-era Fair Employment Practices Commission. If we "call upon [men] to make the supreme sacrifice in foreign fields," he insisted, they should "receive equal treatment in our country." Year after year, Chavez introduced his bill, but opponents blocked his efforts. By the time the Senate passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII of which forbids employment discrimination on the basis of race, gender, or national origin, Chavez had passed away, but that remains as part of his legacy. Dennis Chavez was a trailblazer and a crusader, a prolific legislator, and a voice of conscience, but he preferred to be remembered simply as "El Senador."⁷⁷

Edward Costigan of Colorado

A One-Term Wonder

There are a number of senators who fall into a category that could be called "one-term wonders"—men or women who served a single term in the U.S. Senate but left behind a significant legacy. One such individual was Colorado senator Edward Costigan.

Born in Virginia in 1874, Costigan settled with his family in the Denver area and enjoyed a lifelong association with the state of Colorado. He established a law practice there in 1900 and quickly became active in local government, supporting civil service reform and favoring Prohibition. He ran unsuccessfully for governor in 1912, then spent the next two decades building his law practice, defending the United Mine Workers in several high-profile cases, and serving

on a national tariff commission. In 1930 he looked for new challenges and won a seat in the U.S. Senate.

Costigan served just a single term, from 1931 to 1937. Coming to office in the midst of the Great Depression, he wasted no time in endorsing state relief programs and continued to support labor unions. After "scarcely two months" in office, one reporter wrote, Costigan displayed more interest in aiding the people "than a dozen senators who have been in office" far longer. But it was Edward Costigan's unyielding dedication to one specific cause that earns him a place on the "one-term wonders" list—anti-lynching legislation.⁷⁸

In 1933, working with leaders of the NAACP, Costigan drafted a federal anti-lynching bill. New

York senator Robert Wagner signed on as co-sponsor. The two senators shouldered the burden of advancing the bill through the Senate. The Costigan-Wagner Act sought to impose fines or imprisonment on local and state officials who failed to prevent death or injury at the hands of a lynch mob. U.S. Attorney General Homer Cummings backed the bill, as did a majority of members on the Senate Judiciary Committee, but Senate Majority Leader Joseph Robinson of Arkansas was reluctant to sign on.⁷⁹

Robinson opposed Costigan's bill but agreed to put it forward if it had the support of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. So Costigan and Wagner set up a strategic meeting at the White House with the president and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. The first lady was interested, but the president remained elusive. Although he made statements in favor of anti-lynching legislation, Roosevelt worried that support for such a bill would undermine his standing among southern Democrats and jeopardize major aspects of his New Deal agenda. Despite the senators' persistent efforts, the president refused to intervene, and the anti-lynching bill died.⁸⁰

In 1935 Costigan again introduced an anti-lynching bill. The Judiciary Committee again recommended it, but when Costigan introduced the motion to proceed, southern Democrats launched a filibuster. With South Carolina senator James Byrnes and Alabama senator Hugo Black—both of whom would later serve on the U.S. Supreme Court—joining the effort, the filibuster dragged on, creating a bottleneck that stalled consideration of must-pass legislation such as the Social Security Act and a veterans' bonus bill. Even as lynchings continued in some states, the filibuster held strong against the bill. Under intense pressure and unable to muster the necessary 67 votes to invoke cloture, Costigan withdrew his bill.⁸¹

Suffering the effects of ill health, Costigan declined to seek reelection in 1936. He died in 1939



Senator Edward Costigan. Library of Congress.

without ever seeing an anti-lynching bill come to a vote. In fact, the Senate repeatedly failed to pass anti-lynching legislation, although it did come to regret that fact. On June 13, 2005, the Senate unanimously approved Senate Resolution 39, “apologizing to the victims of lynching” and their descendants for the Senate’s failure to pass Costigan’s bill and similar bills that followed. In December of 2018, the Senate passed by unanimous consent the Justice for Victims of Lynching Act to make lynching a federal crime, but the bill stalled in the House of Representatives and expired at the end of the Congress. A subsequent bill, the Emmett Till Anti-Lynching Act, was introduced in 2019, re-introduced in 2021, and became law in 2022. The legacy of Edward Costigan, one-term wonder from Colorado who fought so hard to pass anti-lynching legislation, remains as relevant today as it was in 1935.⁸²

Robert Wagner of New York

An Intrepid Fighter

New York senator Robert Wagner was born in Germany in 1877 and immigrated with his family to the United States at the age of nine. Raised in the tenements of Manhattan's Lower East Side, Wagner worked his way through college and law school before joining the tumultuous world of New York state politics in the era of Tammany Hall. He became a U.S. senator in 1927 and joined forces with President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930s to enact policies to stimulate economic recovery. Wagner wrote or co-wrote the National Industrial Recovery Act, the Social Security Act, and the GI Bill of Rights, just to name a few. In fact, he probably produced more important and far-reaching legislation than any other senator of his time.⁸³

Wagner was a fighter, someone who would pursue a cause with passion and energy. That fact was demonstrated early in his career, when an industrial tragedy compelled him to take action. In 1911 the devastating fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company in New York City killed 146 workers, most of them women, who could not escape the flames and smoke of the fire because company managers had locked the emergency exits. In the wake of this disaster, then state senator Robert Wagner led a commission to investigate working conditions throughout New York. He interviewed farmworkers who labored through 19-hour shifts with young children at their sides. He saw five-year-old children toiling in factories and on assembly lines. He inspected filthy and dimly lit tenement houses where families labored at so-called piece work. The Wagner Commission's final report laid bare the abhorrent conditions under which many Americans lived and worked. His recommendations—most of which were



Robert F. Wagner, by Steven Polson, 2004. U.S. Senate Collection.

adopted by the state legislature—put New York at the forefront of the national progressive movement.⁸⁴

When Wagner came to the U.S. Senate, he quickly adopted other battles, and always with an eye toward improving the lives of the nation's less fortunate citizens. In the 1930s, for example, he joined Colorado senator Edward Costigan in a fight to pass anti-lynching laws, a battle they lost as southern senators used filibusters to kill bill after bill.⁸⁵

Wagner's most notable accomplishments were enacted into law in 1935—the Social Security Act and the National Labor Relations Act (better known as the Wagner Act). The Social Security Act provided old-age pensions to Americans as well as unemployment insurance and aid to dependent children. The National Labor Relations Act guaranteed to private sector employees the right to organize, to pursue collective bargaining, and to engage in strikes. Enacted

into law as part of the New Deal, both bills have had a lasting impact.⁸⁶

Robert Wagner remained in office—always fighting for a cause—until 1949. He died in New York

City in 1953. In 2000 the Senate bestowed upon him a unique honor given to only nine senators to date, voting to add his portrait to a very select collection in the Senate Reception Room.⁸⁷

Robert Taft of Ohio

Mr. Republican

The political views of Robert Taft “were almost always well known, almost always controversial, and almost always criticized by one important group or another; yet even his opponents agreed that they were expressed with candor, sincerity, fairness, and integrity.” So proclaimed Senator John Kennedy in a 1957 committee report, explaining why

he and his colleagues had chosen the Ohio Republican for inclusion in the Senate’s “Famous Five” collection of portraits.⁸⁸

The son of President William Howard Taft, Robert Taft was born in Cincinnati in 1889. He graduated from Yale University and then Harvard Law School before launching his political career with election to the Ohio state legislature. When he entered the U.S. Senate in 1939, Taft vigorously opposed the policies of the New Deal. He called for limited government at home and nonintervention abroad.

Taft quickly emerged as a leader of the Senate Republicans, but he ignored calls to seek election as floor leader. Instead, he revived the Republican Steering Committee and used its chairmanship to shape the legislative agenda. When the Senate created policy committees in 1946, Republicans again turned to Taft. Under his guidance, the Republican Policy Committee grew into an effective tool for considering policy options, maintaining party consensus, and establishing the order of business on the Senate floor. “What Taft taught us,” commented Illinois senator Everett Dirksen, “was to stay on the job day after day, chipping away until the opposition crumbled.” His skillful leadership also brought him to national attention. “Congress,” noted the *New Republic* in 1947,



Senator Robert Taft. Library of Congress.

“now consists of the House, the Senate, and Bob Taft.” A remarkable capacity for work made him virtually indispensable. The mantra among Republican senators became: “Let Bob do it.” Nationally, Taft became known as “Mr. Republican.”⁸⁹

In 1953, having failed in his third attempt to gain the Republican nomination for president, Taft finally became the Republican floor leader. With his party again in the majority, and by now a familiar face to Americans, Taft exercised tremendous influence over national policy. Many came to see him as the ever-present and indestructible leader, but he was not

immortal. Just three months into his term as majority leader, Taft was stricken with cancer. Three months after that, he was dead.

When portraits of the five “outstanding senators” were unveiled in the Reception Room in 1959, Taft’s image once again graced the Senate. A month later, a large crowd braved a morning chill to see President Dwight D. Eisenhower dedicate the Taft Memorial Bell Tower on Capitol Hill. Incised in the marble above the bronze figure are words paying tribute to “the honesty” and “indomitable courage” of the Ohio senator.⁹⁰

Margaret Chase Smith

The Lady from Maine

Is the Senate any place for a woman? This question dominated the 1948 Senate primary in the state of Maine. Among those seeking the Republican nomination were the current governor, a former governor, and a four-term U.S. representative named Margaret Chase Smith. Throughout the campaign, Smith faced a deeply ingrained prejudice against women holding elective office. One reporter suggested that the “little lady” was overreaching herself. Another scolded that “the Senate is big league stuff.” Even her opponents’ wives joined the fray, with one commenting: “Why [send] a woman to Washington when you can get a man?”⁹¹

Smith countered such arguments by noting the movement from House to Senate had been fairly routine for male senators. “There was no reason to think that simply because I was a woman,” she commented, that “I should not take that step.” She also took advantage of gender-based criticism, comparing management of



Senator Margaret Chase Smith. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

public affairs to management of a household. “Women administer the home,” she explained. “They set the rules, enforce them, and mete out justice for violations. Thus, like Congress, they legislate; like the Executive, they administer; like the courts, they interpret the rules. It is an ideal experience for politics.” Throughout her congressional career, Smith endured sexist press coverage that often ignored her political achievements while running stories such as, “Smith Also Makes ‘Best Brown Bread in County’” and “Margaret Chase Smith, charming legislator . . . and an excellent cook.” In 1948 the *Boston Globe* labeled her as “The Woman Who Thinks Like a Man.”⁹²

Most of the time, however, Smith avoided gender issues. “I want it distinctly understood,” she emphasized during her campaign, “that I am not soliciting support because I am a woman. I solicit your support wholly on the basis of my eight years in Congress.” The voters were impressed. In the June primary, Smith gained twice as many votes as all of

her challengers combined. In the general election, she squashed her Democratic opponent with 71 percent of the vote. On January 3, 1949, Margaret Chase Smith launched a groundbreaking 24-year Senate career, becoming the first woman to serve in both houses of Congress.⁹³

Not content to be limited to “female issues,” Senator Smith proved that women could participate in all areas of national policymaking. She became an outspoken legislator on matters of foreign policy, military affairs, and the arms race and was a firm supporter of the space program. “If it were not for [Margaret Chase Smith],” commented one official at NASA, “we would never have placed a man on the moon.” In both the House and the Senate, she pioneered efforts to provide equal status for women in the military. From 1967 to 1973, she served as the ranking member on the Senate Armed Services Committee.⁹⁴

There were many milestones in her long career. One such event took place on June 1, 1950—just



Senator Margaret Chase Smith during a committee hearing. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

four months after Senator Joseph McCarthy's meteoric rise to fame. Smith delivered what she considered the most important speech of her career, her "Declaration of Conscience," which denounced the tactics that became known as McCarthyism. Over the next four years, until the Senate finally censured McCarthy, Smith was a leader in questioning the goals and methods of the junior senator from Wisconsin.⁹⁵

During her long congressional career, Margaret Chase Smith blazed a trail for other women to follow, including being considered as a vice-presidential candidate in 1952 and 1956, and then becoming the first woman to run for a major-party nomination for

president in 1964. Other milestones were less public, such as breaking down institutional barriers to women serving in the United States Senate.

After four terms in the Senate, Smith lost her final reelection bid in 1972 and retired in 1973. Returning to Maine, she established the Margaret Chase Smith Library in Skowhegan and remained an important role model until her death at age 97. Smith left behind an impressive legacy for women in all professions. When thinking of Margaret Chase Smith, Maine senator William Cohen once remarked, we are reminded of the old Chinese proverb: "When drinking the water, don't forget who dug the well."⁹⁶

Earle Clements of Kentucky

The Quiet Partisan

He was called the "master organizer" and the "most accomplished political operator" of his time, but today he's largely unknown outside his home state of Kentucky. A dedicated party man, his Senate career marked him as a "work horse," not a "show horse." A reporter once commented that he was "as plain as an old shoe" but an accomplished legislator. For 29 days in 1955, this quiet partisan held the reins of Senate power.⁹⁷

Born in Kentucky in 1896, Earle Clements began his public service career as a county sheriff, then steadily climbed the political ladder. Elected governor in 1947, he built new schools and modernized the police force. Under his leadership, the state took its first legislative steps toward desegregating public schools. The 1950 election brought him to the Senate, where he quickly entered the ranks of party leadership—campaign committee chair in 1952 and

party whip in 1953. As whip Clements served as second-in-command to party leader Lyndon Johnson—and that brings us to the heart of this story.

Today, Lyndon Johnson of Texas has taken on mythical standing as a "master of the Senate"—powerful, perhaps invincible—but during his Senate years Johnson endured multiple health crises. The most critical episode came on July 2, 1955, when the 46-year-old Texan suffered a major heart attack. Party leader since 1953, Johnson had been majority leader barely six months, and he took the majority with the slimmest of margins—a single vote—a situation that improved only slightly when the Independent Oregon senator Wayne Morse agreed to support the Democrats. Johnson's heart attack came just as the Senate began a brief Fourth of July recess. When senators returned to work on July 5, Earle Clements became acting majority leader and continued

as leader throughout the remaining 29 days of that busy session. Clements's great challenge, noted one reporter, was to show "whether his generalship is equal to Mr. Johnson's."⁹⁸

With Clements occupying the leader's desk, Republican president Dwight D. Eisenhower hoped to gain some legislative ground. Johnson remained hospitalized and unable to vote, so the Democrats' narrow majority was vulnerable to Vice President Richard M. Nixon's tie-breaking vote. Eisenhower prodded his Senate allies to take action on his stalled proposals, including his Atoms for Peace nuclear power program, which had met with stiff Democratic resistance. Clements quickly pushed back, making it clear that he intended to continue what Johnson had labeled "responsible opposition." Throughout the final weeks of the session, Clements effectively maintained

a unified coalition that kept the president in a perpetual state of frustration.⁹⁹

When the Senate returned in January of 1956, a still-recovering Lyndon Johnson was back on the job, and Clements resumed his whip duties. Throughout his short leadership tenure, Clements had remained a steadfast party operator and a tough task master. Oklahoma senator Robert Kerr remarked that he was demanding, but his leadership was "matchless." Clements's moment of power came at a cost. The heavy workload of leadership had kept him off the campaign trail, and he lost his bid for reelection. His Senate career ended, but he left office with a sense of accomplishment. During those 29 days in 1955, this Kentucky senator took command, held his caucus together, and guided the legislative agenda. "Working quietly," commented a reporter, "he gets the job done."¹⁰⁰



Senator Earle Clements. University of Kentucky Libraries Special Collections Research Center, Portrait Print Collection.

Wayne Morse of Oregon

The Loneliest Man in the Senate

His friends called him “The Tiger of the Senate.” His enemies described him in much harsher terms. In 1953 a reporter labeled him the “loneliest man” in the Senate. By any name, Wayne Morse of Oregon was one of the Senate’s most unpredictable members and—for a brief time in the 1950s—one of its most powerful.¹⁰¹

Born on a Wisconsin farm in 1900, Morse attended the University of Wisconsin and Columbia Law School. In 1929, while serving as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army Reserve, Morse accepted a teaching position at the University of Oregon and later became dean of the law school. Oregonians elected him to the U.S. Senate in 1944.

Although Morse was elected to the Senate as a Republican, during the 1952 presidential campaign he broke ranks with GOP leaders over the party platform and Dwight D. Eisenhower’s choice of Richard M. Nixon as vice president. In October 1952, Morse announced that while holding fast “to the tenets of the political philosophy of Lincoln,” he was leaving the Republican Party to become an Independent. When the Senate convened on January 3, 1953, Morse entered the Chamber carrying a folding chair, prepared to place it in the middle of the center aisle as a dramatic symbol of his independence. He declared himself a one-man party. Given his cantankerous personality, many thought it best for him to remain a one-man party. If anyone else joined the party, a colleague predicted, it would soon split into two warring factions.¹⁰²

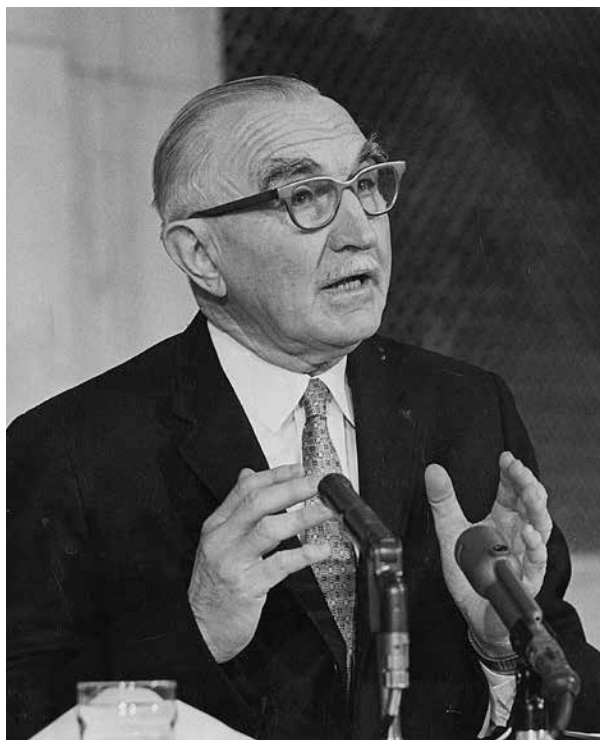
Morse realized that his defection from the GOP would cost him seniority on committees, but he hoped that his eight years of Senate service and his

agreement to vote with the Republicans to organize the Senate would safeguard his two prized committee assignments. He was stunned, therefore, when Republican Leader Robert Taft summarily removed him from both committees. Morse responded by invoking an arcane Senate rule that required the entire Senate to vote on each committee assignment. In retaliation, Taft conspired with Democratic Leader Lyndon Johnson to guarantee that Morse received only the least-desired assignments. This prompted the infuriated Independent to blast Taft for using a “terroristic device to compel compliance.” Morse then nominated himself—on behalf of his Independent Party—to serve on two powerful committees. When the Senate voted on January 13, only seven members supported Morse and he went down in defeat. He branded his opponents as “gutless wonders” and angrily rejected what he called “garbage can” assignments. In desperation he sought a compromise that would put him back on his desired committees. The Senate rejected that compromise, forcing the disheartened Morse to accept banishment to the Committee on the District of Columbia.¹⁰³

Two years later, when the Senate convened the 84th Congress in 1955, it teetered between two closely divided parties—48 Democrats opposed 47 Republicans. Morse remained the lonely Independent, but the balance of power had shifted. His vote would now decide the majority. Depending upon which way Morse cast his allegiance, Democrats would control the Senate or the Republicans would gain control with Vice President Nixon’s tie-breaking vote. Suddenly, the loneliest man in the Senate was—to borrow

a phrase—“cloaked in immense power.” While the new Republican leader, William Knowland of California, tarried, Lyndon Johnson pounced. He promised Morse a seat on any committees of his choice. The Democrats got the majority and Senator Morse got Banking and Foreign Relations.¹⁰⁴

Morse’s regained status within the Democratic majority proved to be no guarantee of his future cooperation. Soon after Morse helped establish Democratic control of the Senate, Chinese aggression in the Taiwanese Strait prompted President Eisenhower to request authorization for use of military force. The House of Representatives promptly passed House Joint Resolution 159, and senators of both parties lined up to support the bill, but Morse protested. The resolution “may be a predated declaration of war,” he worried. Only two senators backed Morse’s position, and the Senate swiftly approved the resolution, but Eisenhower chose not to engage U.S. forces in the conflict.¹⁰⁵



Senator Wayne Morse. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

Nine years later, in August of 1964, another president requested a congressional authorization for the use of military force, this time in Vietnam. President Lyndon B. Johnson reported to select members of Congress that the North Vietnamese had attacked U.S. patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin. Like Eisenhower, Johnson asked Congress to approve a resolution granting him broad authority to respond. Again Morse protested. “The unlimited language of the resolution would authorize acts of war,” Morse accurately predicted. “The broad, sweeping, sanction of power . . . will give to the President . . . [the] power to carry on whatever type of war he wishes to wage in southeast Asia.” After a two-day debate, Morse again found himself on the losing side of an issue. Eighty-eight senators approved the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. Only Morse and Alaska senator Ernest Gruening dissented. As the Senate prepared for that historic vote, Morse made a solemn prediction: “I believe that within the next century, future generations will look with dismay and great disappointment upon a Congress which is now about to make such a historic mistake.”¹⁰⁶

Morse’s Senate service ended on January 3, 1969, after he was defeated for reelection in 1968. He ran unsuccessfully for Oregon’s other Senate seat in 1972 and was actively campaigning for his old seat in 1974 when he died on July 22. Remembering Morse as an honest man, Minnesota senator Eugene McCarthy admitted, “He was never a member of the club.” Another contemporary noted that there “were those who said Mr. Morse frittered away effectiveness by his impulse to be a loner and an irritant, a man who often infuriated his colleagues. But if he did that he also won their admiration for his tenacity of purpose, his infectious love for the Senate and the clarity and industry he brought to public issues.” Wayne Morse may have been lonely, but he was a force to reckon with in the Senate.¹⁰⁷

Robert Kerr of Oklahoma

The Uncrowned King of the Senate

A powerhouse in American politics of the 1950s and early 1960s, Robert Kerr of Oklahoma was known as the “Uncrowned King of the Senate.” Born in the Oklahoma Territory in 1896, the son of a pioneering farmer, Kerr’s humble beginnings made his rise to wealth and power even more noteworthy. As a young man, he told his father that he had three goals in life: to have a family, to make a million dollars, and to be governor of Oklahoma. He achieved all of that, and more.

Kerr attended public schools, completed a two-year college correspondence course, and studied law, but destiny took him away from a legal career. In 1929 Kerr formed an oil-drilling partnership with his brother-in-law. Soon, he began a profitable collaboration with Phillips Petroleum. That led him to geologist Dean McGee, and the McGee-Kerr Oil Industry was born. Within a decade, Bob Kerr was a multi-millionaire.

Backed by his growing fortune, Kerr became a powerful political operator. He rose quickly through various state offices and became governor in 1942. Elected to the Senate six years later, Kerr came in with the remarkable class of ’48, which included freshman senators Lyndon Johnson, Clinton Anderson, Hubert Humphrey, Russell Long, Estes Kefauver, and Margaret Chase Smith. Even in that crowd, Kerr stood out. He brought to the Senate a caustic wit, a formidable talent for debate, an unflappable self-confidence, and a massive personal fortune. To many, he seemed unstoppable. Speaker of the House Samuel Rayburn once commented: “Bob Kerr is the kind of man who would charge hell with a bucket of water and believe he could put it out.”¹⁰⁸



Senator Robert Kerr. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

Building strong alliances with southern and western senators, particularly Georgia’s Richard Russell, Kerr used his position on the Public Works and Finance Committees to promote an ambitious plan for regional development in Oklahoma. His most notable achievement became the Arkansas River Navigation System. This network of rivers, locks, dams, and canals created a navigable inland waterway extending from Catoosa, Oklahoma, to the Mississippi River, connecting the Oklahoma port to the Gulf of Mexico.¹⁰⁹

Bob Kerr reached the apex of his power in the early 1960s, when nearly every proposal of the John F. Kennedy administration bore his mark. “What Kerr wants, Kennedy gets,” became a Senate

cloakroom adage. Much of that power derived from his legislative skill, but equally important was his tremendous personal wealth. In an era when campaign funds were disbursed in cash-stuffed envelopes, Kerr kept vast sums of money in his office safe and routinely carried large sums of cash in his pocket. “He would help everybody who came to him [for] campaign money,” recalled Florida senator George Smathers. “He’d just open his pocket up

and give it to them.” Needless to say, this made him quite influential.¹¹⁰

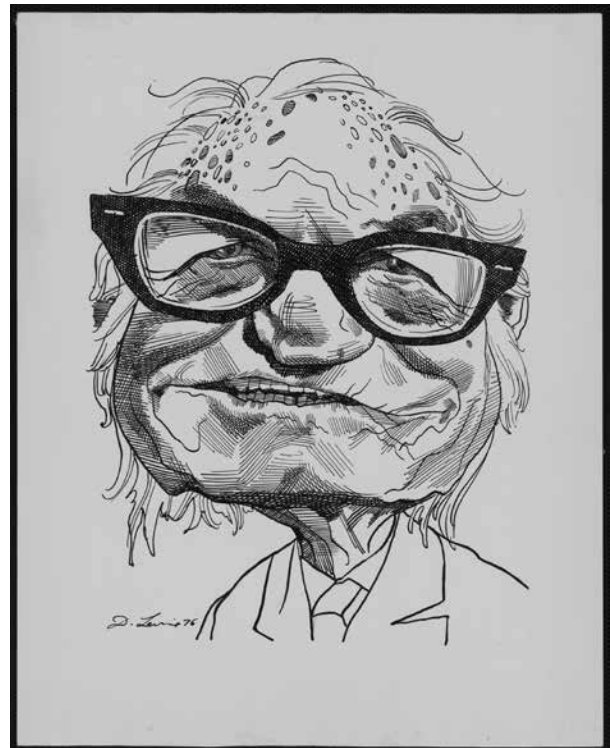
Before his death in 1963, Bob Kerr crafted social security policy and guided the space program, but always his priority was the promotion of Oklahoma. In doing so, he added even more to his fortune, but wealth was not his principal motivation. As one biographer noted, for Kerr, “Business was a diversion; riches, the pleasing result,” but “politics was his passion.”¹¹¹

Barry Goldwater of Arizona

The Voice of Modern Conservatism

Barry Goldwater was born in Arizona in 1909, three years before Arizona became the 48th state. He loved exploring its rugged landscape, often piloting his own plane and always carrying a camera. He considered a military career, but his father’s poor health forced him into the family business, Goldwater’s Department Store. By the late 1940s, he turned his attention to politics, winning a seat on the Phoenix City Council in 1949.

Soon, Goldwater was tackling bigger political challenges. In 1952 he defeated the popular incumbent senator Ernest McFarland, who happened to be the Senate’s Democratic majority leader. As senator, Goldwater proposed a new—some said radical—political agenda. “He preached the cause of modern conservatism,” wrote one biographer, which emphasized “individualism, the sanctity of private property, militant anticommunism, and the dangers of federally centralized power.” The freshman senator quickly moved into the ranks of leadership, becoming chair of the Republican Campaign Committee in 1955.¹¹²



Senator Barry Goldwater, by David Levine, 1976. Library of Congress.

With publication of *The Conscience of a Conservative* in 1960, Goldwater became the leader of a national movement. Written with speechwriter Brent

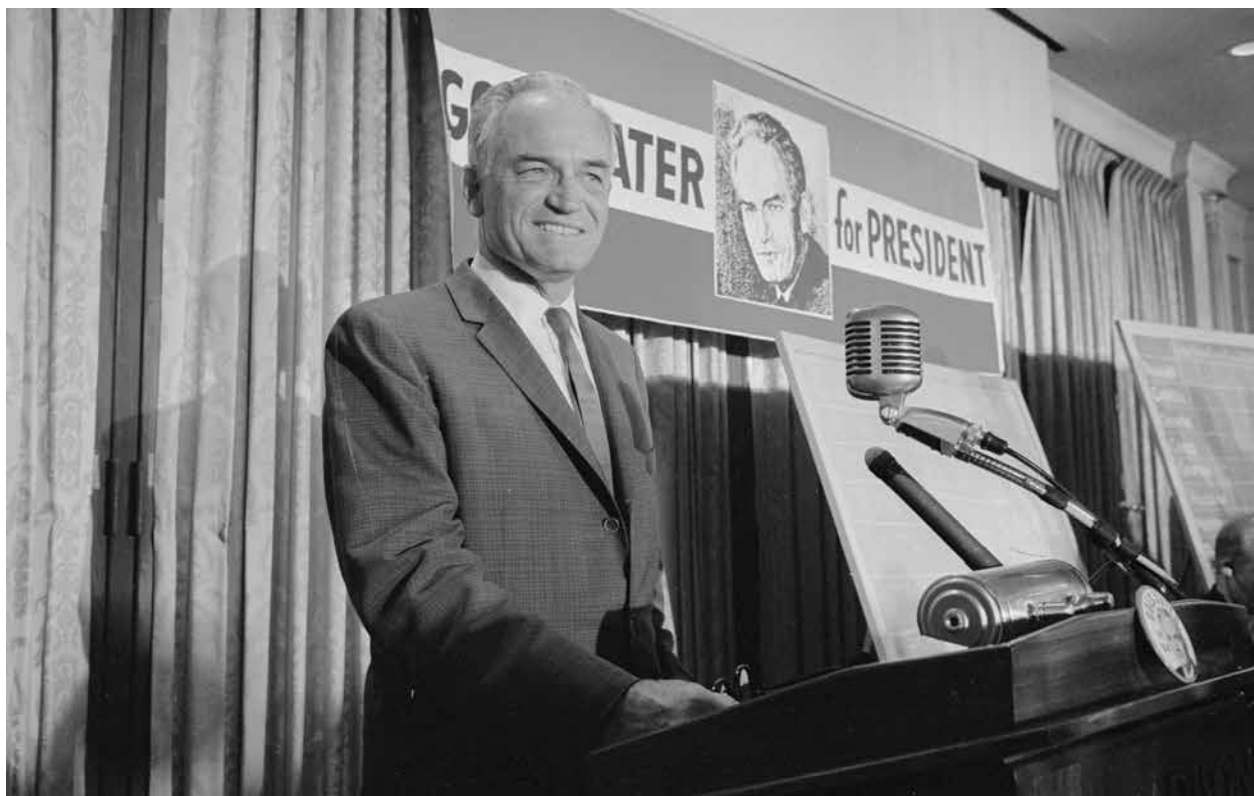
Bozell, the book was a statement of Goldwater's political creed. In chapters that focused on issues such as civil rights, labor relations, and the welfare state, Goldwater called for the "utmost vigilance and care . . . to keep political power within its proper bounds." The national media initially ignored the book, but Goldwater's vision gained an audience. The book became a best seller. Today, it is considered a landmark in the development of modern conservatism.¹¹³

In January 1964, Goldwater announced his candidacy for president, facing strong competition within his own party. He lost five of the first six primaries to Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., but then emerged as the front-runner in May and cinched the nomination in June. That victory was bittersweet, however, since Goldwater's nomination split the Republican ranks between moderates and conservatives. "Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice," Goldwater

famously proclaimed in his acceptance speech, hoping to quell dissent. "Moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue."¹¹⁴

Such comments bolstered his followers but also aided the Democrats, who backed Lyndon B. Johnson. They effectively portrayed Goldwater as a dangerous extremist in a barrage of campaign speeches and television ads that evoked images of nuclear war. "The whole campaign was run on fear of me," Goldwater later recalled. "In fact, if I hadn't known Goldwater," he added, "I'd have voted against the s.o.b. myself."¹¹⁵

Goldwater lost the election, but media coverage of Johnson's victory largely missed important underlying trends that would fuel conservative victories in the years ahead, particularly in 1980. Returning to the Senate in 1969, Goldwater was on hand to witness those victories—as Arizona's elder statesman enjoying the fulfillment of his conservative vision.



Senator Barry Goldwater on the night of the New Hampshire presidential primary, March 10, 1964, photograph by Marion S. Trikosko. Library of Congress.

George Murphy of California

The Man behind the Candy Desk

Most senators enter the Senate Chamber through its eastern door, adjacent to a busy set of elevators. Just inside this door, to the right and along the aisle at the rear of the Chamber, sits the Candy Desk. This conveniently located fixture serves as a gathering spot for senators wishing to satisfy a late-afternoon energy deficit. By Senate standards, the Candy Desk is a fairly recent addition, but it's proven to be an enduring tradition—and it's all due to a well-known freshman from the 1960s named George Murphy.

Born in 1902, George Murphy's athletic skills gained him a Yale scholarship, but he never excelled academically. He left school to seek employment as a coal miner, as a messenger on Wall Street, and in a host of other positions. Then, in 1926, he married a young New York actress named Julie Henkel-Johnson who taught him to dance. Before long they were performing in nightclubs, in vaudeville, and eventually on Broadway. Hollywood called in 1934, and over the next two decades George Murphy starred in more than 40 films, becoming a popular musical and dramatic actor.¹¹⁶

By that time, Murphy also was playing an active role in politics. In 1939, along with fellow dancer Fred Astaire, Murphy founded the Hollywood Republican Committee. He became a leader of Hollywood's conservative bloc, a group that eventually included an actor named Ronald Reagan. In fact, Murphy helped to pave the way for Reagan's successful transition from Hollywood actor to national politician. One of the earliest members of the Screen Actors Guild, Murphy became the guild's president in 1944—two years before Reagan assumed that post. Murphy



Senator George Murphy. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

fought against racketeering and promoted better working conditions for screen actors, all causes subsequently championed by Reagan. Murphy also took a strong and controversial stand against communist activities in Hollywood, again setting the stage for Ronald Reagan.

By 1952, when he quit acting, George Murphy had become an influential figure in the Republican Party. He provided programming for four national party conventions and directed both presidential inaugurations for Dwight D. Eisenhower. Under his guidance, the 1957 ceremony reached new heights of glitz and glamour, and his political future looked increasingly more promising. No one was surprised, therefore, when he became a U.S. senator in 1965—as

one reporter noted, he'd "been practicing for the job for a long, long time"—but Murphy's Senate career did not last long. In 1966 he was diagnosed with throat cancer. Surgery successfully removed the cancer, but it also took away his voice, leaving him unable to speak above a whisper for the rest of his life—a clear disadvantage on the campaign trail. He lost his bid for reelection in 1970 but remained active in politics until his death in 1992.¹¹⁷

During his brief tenure in the Senate, Murphy began keeping candy in his desk, often sharing the sweets with his colleagues. Subsequently, other senators who occupied a desk in that location began stocking the drawer with their favorite confections. A tradition was born. When Murphy departed the Senate in 1971, he left behind the candy desk tradition, but that's the least of his contributions. If you happen to see a senator reach into that well-stocked desk drawer,



The Candy Desk. Office of the Senate Curator.

remember Senator Murphy—an old song-and-dance man whose political career set the stage for one of the 20th century's most influential presidents. There was a lot more to George Murphy than his sweet tooth.¹¹⁸

Everett Dirksen of Illinois

The Senate's Golden Voice

The position of Senate minority leader may be one of the toughest jobs on Capitol Hill. No one knew that better than Everett Dirksen of Illinois. During his 10 years as Republican floor leader, beginning in 1959, the number of Senate Republicans never exceeded 36. Yet, as an intelligent and resourceful legislator, Dirksen routinely influenced the agenda of the majority-party Democrats. In fact, by 1965 he was considered to be one of the most powerful men in the Senate.¹¹⁹

Born in Pekin, Illinois, in 1896, Dirksen's earliest ambition was to go on the stage, but eventually he was drawn to that other theater—politics. "The ambition to

sit in Congress is probably similar to the flu," he once said. "Everybody gets it at some time or another." He came to Congress as a House member in 1933 and then gained national attention in 1950 by unseating Senate Majority Leader Scott Lucas. Elected Republican whip in 1957, he rose to floor leader two years later.¹²⁰

By the 1960s, in contrast to the quiet and often evasive Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, Dirksen became the public face of the Senate. His carefully tousled hair, his ready supply of quotations, and his cathedral-organ voice were all part of a very public persona. He served as the grand marshal of the Tournament of Roses parade. He recorded several albums

of dramatic readings, for which he won a Grammy Award and became a recording star. He pioneered a televised weekly press conference with his House counterpart, Representative Charles Halleck, known as the “Ev and Charlie Show.”¹²¹

Dirksen’s admirers called him the “Golden Voice of the Senate,” but his dramatic flair and comic touch



Senator Everett Dirksen. Dirksen Congressional Center.

also encouraged political cartoonists, who depicted him as the “Wizard of Ooze.” Dirksen “somehow slipped off the track and wound up with the image of a clown,” Minnesota senator Hubert Humphrey remarked. “In actual fact, he is a skillful, imaginative, and patriotic man.” Dirksen was also a master legislator, and his skills were most evident during the long debate over the Civil Rights Act of 1964.¹²²

Dirksen sensed that a civil rights bill would pass that year. As Arizona senator Barry Goldwater quipped, “That old boy’s got an antenna three feet long!” Consequently, the Republican leader sought ways to make the bill both equitable and passable. He worried about increasing federal power through creation of new executive agencies and the potential for excessive litigation. Through a series of negotiated amendments, he shaped the bill to address such concerns. His careful tinkering with the bill allowed him to maintain the support of many of his fellow Republicans in the Senate, while providing essential support to Mansfield, who needed 67 votes to invoke cloture and end a lengthy filibuster. By the time the Senate passed this landmark legislation in June of 1964, it was known as “Dirksen’s Bill.”¹²³

Everett Dirksen died on September 7, 1969. In announcing the death to his Senate colleagues, Mike Mansfield eulogized his friend with these simple words: “His uniqueness is the stuff of legends.”¹²⁴

Edward Brooke of Massachusetts

The Bridge Builder

The first African American senator, Hiram Revels of Mississippi, took office in 1870 and served a short one-year term. He was followed by another African American senator from

Mississippi, Blanche Bruce, who served a full term from 1875 to 1881. These two men broke the barrier to Black senators, but it took nearly nine decades for that line to be crossed again. Much attention has been

given to Revels and Bruce, but too often neglected is the story of Edward Brooke of Massachusetts, who served in the Senate from 1967 to 1979.

Born and raised in the District of Columbia, Brooke's career in public service began shortly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. The Howard University graduate and former ROTC cadet first served stateside and then in 1944 sailed to the European theater with the army's segregated 366th Combat Infantry unit. Serving in North Africa and Italy, Captain Edward Brooke faced daily reminders of his imposed second-class status, enduring racist tirades from his commanding officers and facing widespread discrimination on military bases. He never forgot the demoralizing sting of racism.

After the war, Brooke moved to Boston, graduated from Boston University Law School, and began a political career, but there was one stumbling block. Which party would he join? His parents were loyal Lincoln Republicans, but Brooke considered himself a pragmatist and hoped to avoid party labels. In his first race for public office, he ran in both party primaries. When the state legislature eliminated cross-party listing in the early 1950s, however, Brooke was forced to make a decision. He registered as a Republican and quickly rose through party ranks. In 1962 he became the nation's first African American state attorney general. Four years later, he was elected to the Senate—the first Black senator in 86 years, and as it turned out, the last until 1993, when Illinois senator Carol Moseley Braun became the first African American woman to serve in the Senate.¹²⁵

The grandson of an enslaved Virginian, Brooke pledged to use his Senate platform to help shatter stereotypes and undercut persistent patterns of discrimination, particularly in housing. He co-sponsored the Fair Housing Act with Minnesota senator Walter Mondale, part of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 that prohibited discrimination in the sale, rental, or



Senator Edward Brooke. Library of Congress.

financing of housing nationwide. Passing this ambitious civil rights bill, which faced strong opposition from southern segregationists, required patience and political acumen. At a time when it took 67 votes to invoke cloture and overcome a filibuster, Brooke and Mondale painstakingly built a coalition to pass the bill. After weeks of debate, and three failed cloture motions, the Senate finally invoked cloture and approved the bill. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed it into law on April 11, 1968, as Brooke stood by his side.¹²⁶

Senator Brooke was by nature a problem solver and a coalition builder, but he didn't hesitate to oppose presidents of either party. In 1970, for example, when President Richard M. Nixon nominated Harold Carswell to a vacancy on the U.S. Supreme Court, Brooke

successfully whipped votes to defeat the confirmation of a man who proclaimed that racial segregation was “proper,” “practical,” and “correct.” In 1973, following the revelations of the Watergate scandal, Brooke was the first Republican senator to publicly call for President Nixon’s resignation.¹²⁷

Today, Edward Brooke is probably best remembered for his persistent independence, but he was a transitional figure in Senate history. As the first African American to be popularly elected to the Senate, Brooke helped to bridge that very wide gap between the era of Jim Crow and the modern Senate.¹²⁸



President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Fair Housing Act, as Senator Edward Brooke and others look on, April 11, 1968. Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, National Archives.



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¹¹³ Barry Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative* (Shepherdsville, KY: Victor Publishing Company, 1960), 13–14; Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 138–44. For a sample of reactions, see: “Sen. Goldwater’s Conservatism Finds Support in Many Quarters,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 11, 1960, B5; “Campus Radicals,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 3, 1960, 14; “These Days . . . The Phenomenon of Barry Goldwater,” *Washington Post*, June 17, 1960, A19.

¹¹⁴ “Goldwater Swings from the Floor,” *Boston Globe*, July 17, 1964, 1.

¹¹⁵ Peter Iverson, *Barry Goldwater: Native Arizonan* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 92–127; “Barry Goldwater, ‘64 Nominee, Dies,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 30, 1998, 1.

¹¹⁶ For biographical information, see: George Murphy, with Victor Lasky, “Say . . . Didn’t You Used to be George Murphy?” (New York: Barthelomew House, 1970).

¹¹⁷ “George Murphy to Run Inaugural Entertainment,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 9, 1952, 6; “Hollywood’s Basking in a New Glory,” *Washington Post*, January 27, 1957, H7; “Two Inaugurations set for Eisenhower,” *Christian Science Monitor*, December 6, 1956, 14; “State’s George Murphy Danced Way into Senate,” *Hartford Courant*, January 24, 1965, 36A; “George Murphy Against the Tide,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 5, 1964, A4; “Murphy Cancer Cured, doctors Believe; Illness Began in 1953,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 1970, FB; “George Murphy, 89; Actor-Dancer Who Served 1 Term in U.S. Senate,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 5, 1992, 266.

¹¹⁸ For good coverage of Murphy’s political influence, see: Steven J. Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right: How Movie Stars Shaped American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹¹⁹ For example, see: “How Dirksen’s Honeyed Tones Get for Him What He Wants,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 18, 1963, 7; “President May Think Twice about Joining the Fight Against Dirksen,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 18, 1962, A5.

¹²⁰ Everett M. Dirksen, “Mr. Dirksen Goes to Congress,” *New Outlook*, March 1933, 23; “Dirksen Defeats Lucas in Illinois,” *New York Times*, November 8, 1950, 1; Annette Culler Penney, *The Golden Voice of the Senate* (Washington, DC: Acropolis Books, 1968), 113.

¹²¹ “Unique Dirksen Manner Adds to His Strength,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 1965, F2; “Dirksen Wins Grammy Award,” *Boston Globe*, March 1, 1968, 16; Neil MacNeil, *Dirksen: Portrait of a Public Man* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1970), 187–89.

¹²² “Golden Voice” Has Talking Memorial,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 16, 1969, 7C; “The Wizard of Ooze—72—and Still Oozing Strong,” *Boston Globe*, April 7, 1968, G4. Humphrey quoted in Charles and Barbara Whalen, *The Longest Debate: A Legislative History of the 1964 Civil Rights Act* (Cabin John, MD: Seven Locks Press, 1985), 155.

¹²³ Goldwater quoted in David W. Reinhard, *The Republican Right Since 1945* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 191. On Dirksen’s role in passing the Civil Rights Act, see: Whalen, *The Longest Debate*; Edward L. and Frederick H. Schapsmeier, *Dirksen of Illinois: Senatorial Statesman* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Clay Risen, *The Bill of the Century: The Epic Battle for the Civil Rights Act* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2014).

¹²⁴ *Congressional Record*, 91st Cong., 1st sess., September 8, 1969, 24698.

¹²⁵ “Brooke Takes Office as Mass. Attorney General,” *Chicago Defender*, January 17, 1963, 4; “Brooke Takes a Giant Step into National Prominence,” *Boston Globe*, November 11, 1966, 18.

¹²⁶ Rigel C. Oliveri, “The Legislative Battle for the Fair Housing Act (1966–1968),” in Gregory D. Squires, ed., *The Fight for Fair Housing: Causes, Consequences and Future Implications of the 1968 Federal Fair Housing Act* (New York: Routledge, 2017); “Congress Passes Rights Bill: Bars Bias in 80% of Housing,” *Boston Globe*, April 11, 1968, 1; “President Signs Civil Rights Bill: Pleads for Calm,” *New York Times*, April 12, 1968, 1; *Civil Rights Act of 1968*, Title VIII, *Fair Housing*, Public Law 90-284, 82 Stat. 73 (1968).

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¹²⁸ Edward Brooke, *Bridging the Divide: My Life* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007); John Henry Cutler, *Ed Brooke: Biography of a Senator* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1972).



CHAPTER 3

Senate of the Civil War Era

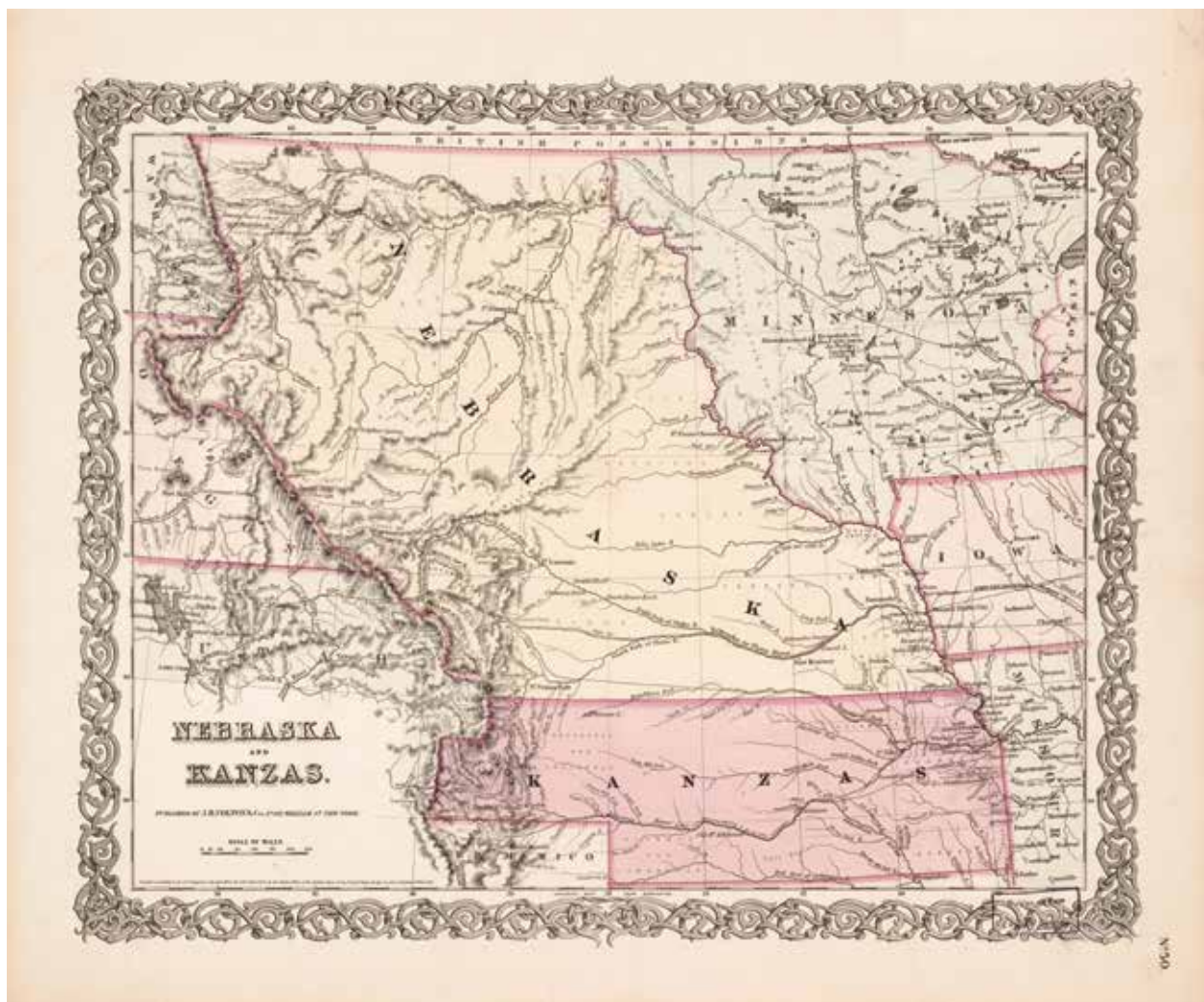


The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854

In 1854 Senator Stephen Douglas of Illinois presented a bill destined to be one of the most consequential pieces of legislation in the nation's history. Ostensibly a bill "to organize the Territory of Nebraska," an area covering the present-day states of Kansas, Nebraska, Montana, and the Dakotas, contemporaries called it "the Nebraska bill." Today, it is known as the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854.

By the 1850s, there were urgent demands to organize the western territories. Land acquired from

Mexico in 1848, the California gold rush, which peaked in 1849, and the relentless trend toward westward expansion pushed farmers, ranchers, and prospectors toward the Pacific, often at the cost of Native American communities. The Mississippi River had long served as a highway to north-south traffic, but western lands needed a river of steel, not of water—a transcontinental railroad to link the eastern states to the Pacific. But what route would that railroad take?

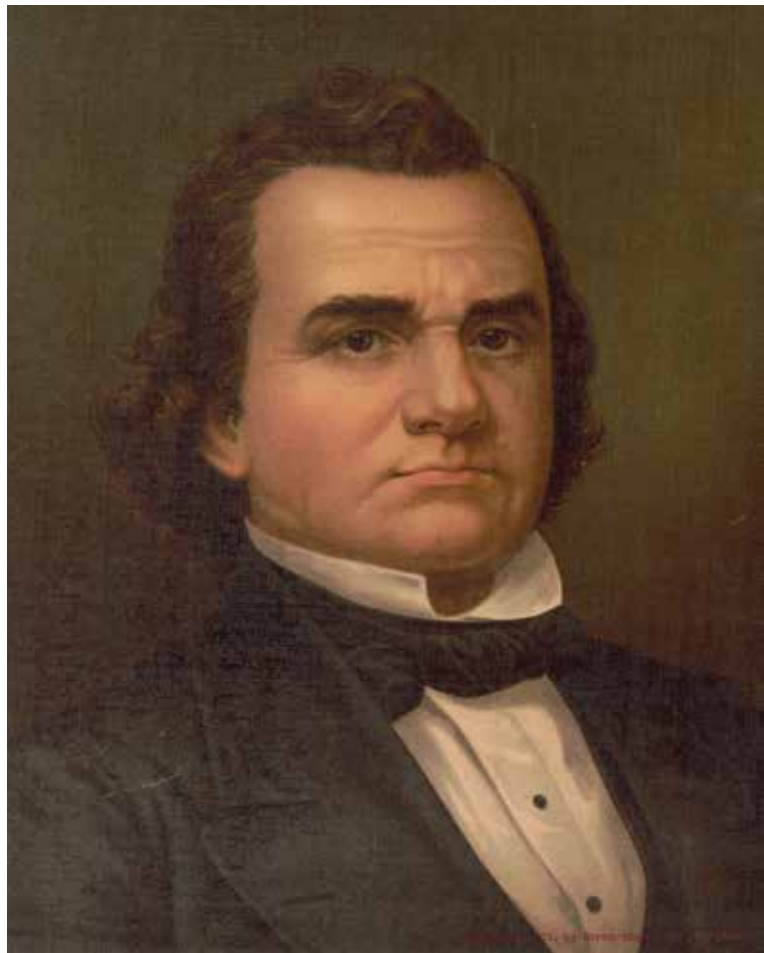


Map of Nebraska and Kansas, 1855. Library of Congress.

Stephen Douglas, one of the railroad's chief promoters, wanted a northern route via Chicago, taking the rail lines through the unorganized Nebraska territory, which lay north of the 1820 Missouri Compromise line where slavery was prohibited. Others, particularly enslavers and their allies, preferred a southern route, perhaps through the new state of Texas. To pass his Nebraska bill, Douglas needed a compromise.¹

On January 4, 1854, Douglas introduced a bill designed to tread middle ground. He proposed organizing the vast territory “with or without slavery, as their constitutions may prescribe.” Known as “popular sovereignty,” this policy contradicted the Missouri Compromise and left open the question of the expansion of slavery, but that was not enough to satisfy a group of powerful southern senators led by Missouri’s David Atchison. They wanted to explicitly repeal the 1820 line. Douglas viewed the railroad as the “onward march of civilization,” and so he agreed to their demands. “I will incorporate it into my bill,” he stated, “though I know it will raise a hell of a storm.” From that moment on, the debate over the Nebraska bill was no longer a discussion of railroad lines. It was all about slavery.²

Douglas introduced his revised bill—and the storm began. Ohio senator Salmon Chase denounced the bill as “a gross violation of a sacred pledge.” In a published broadside, the antislavery coalition built by Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner attacked Douglas, arguing that his bill would make the new territories “a dreary region of despotism, inhabited by masters and slaves.” The fierce drama climaxed as a late-night session on March 3, 1854, turned to



Senator Stephen Douglas. Library of Congress.

a new day. “You must provide for continuous lines of settlement from the Mississippi Valley to the Pacific Ocean,” Douglas pleaded as the debate drew to a close. “[Do not] fetter the limbs of [this] young giant.” At five o’clock in the morning, the Senate voted 37 to 14 to pass the Nebraska bill. It became law on May 30, 1854.³

The Kansas-Nebraska Act repealed the Missouri Compromise, created two new territories, and allowed for popular sovereignty. It also produced a violent uprising known as “Bleeding Kansas,” as proslavery and antislavery activists flooded into the territory. Political turmoil followed. Stephen Douglas had touted his bill as a peaceful settlement of national issues, but what it produced was a prelude to civil war.⁴

James Grimes and the Consequences of the Kansas-Nebraska Act

Passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 had far-reaching consequences, illustrated by the story of Iowa senator James Grimes. Born in New Hampshire in 1816, Grimes was educated at Dartmouth, read law, and then traveled west to seek his fortune. He made it across the Mississippi River and then stopped, settling in Burlington in the territory that would soon become the state of Iowa. A year later, the 21-year-old lawyer gained election to the territorial assembly. When Iowa became a state in 1846, he moved to the state legislature. By the 1850s, James Grimes was poised for an influential political career.

Grimes had long been a member of the Whig Party, but the events of 1854 changed everything. Passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act radicalized many activists in the North, broke down old coalitions, and fueled a host of political factions. In Iowa, passage of the law stirred fears of a stealthy gain in enslavers' power. "Bounded on two sides by slave states," Grimes declared, "we shall be intersected with underground railroads and continually distracted by slave hunts." In August of 1854, after a campaign denouncing the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Grimes was elected governor. In his inaugural address, he proclaimed all compromises with slavery to be "mere ropes of sand."⁵

Grimes's election as governor reflected a fusion of antislavery forces that set the stage for a new political party. In April 1855 Governor Grimes declared it was time for Iowa to "thoroughly organize the Republican party." That organization came 10 months later. While Grimes led the way in Iowa, similar scenarios played out in other states—Wisconsin,



Senator James Grimes. Library of Congress.

Michigan, Ohio—as repercussions of the Kansas-Nebraska Act shaped political debate across the growing nation.⁶

Grimes's four years as governor were transformative. Working with the state legislature, his administration succeeded in moving the state capital to Des Moines, rewriting the state constitution, establishing a state university, and securing federal grant money for railroad construction. As the national debate over slavery reached a fever pitch, Grimes made his sympathies clear. "The federal government was established 'to secure the blessings of liberty,'" he proclaimed, "not to perpetuate and

extend human bondage.” In 1858 the Iowa state legislature sent James Grimes to the Senate.⁷

Grimes enjoyed a notable Senate career, chairing the Committee on Land Claims and serving on the Joint Committee on Reconstruction. The most dramatic moment of his career came during the 1868 impeachment trial of President Andrew Johnson. Grimes joined six other “Republican Recusants” and voted to acquit the Democratic president. In the wake of that vote, the Iowa senator was hanged in effigy by angry constituents and skewered by the press, which accused him of corruption. “Guilty, until [his] innocence is proven,” proclaimed one Iowa newspaper. Even though modern scholarship

has revised the reputation of some who voted for acquittal in exchange for bribes, it appears that Grimes voted out of conviction, not greed.⁸

Today, James Grimes is probably best remembered for that impeachment vote, but his real contribution lies elsewhere. In the wake of the fateful passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, it was the Grimes-led coalition of reformers who established the Republican Party in Iowa. That, in turn, became one of the building blocks for creation of a national GOP. The Kansas-Nebraska Act—and the reaction to it—fostered the careers of many reformers who came to the Senate in the 1850s and 1860s. James Grimes is just one notable example.

The Caning of Charles Sumner

On May 19, 1856, before a crowded Senate Chamber, Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner rose to speak on the explosive issue of slavery in the western territories and the 1854 passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Sumner’s speech sparked a level of violence in the Senate Chamber not seen before or since and marked a turning point in Senate history.

Born in Boston in 1811, Sumner was a quiet, bookish boy. Although the family often struggled financially, Sumner’s parents recognized the importance of education and sent Charles to the Boston Latin School and later Harvard. Although he proved to be a mediocre student, he did find friends and influential colleagues among his Harvard companions and the activists and philosophers gathering in Boston and nearby Concord. He excelled in erudite conversation and soon became, as one biographer noted, “one of the greatest talkers in American history.” When he

entered Harvard Law School in 1831, he came under the tutelage of Justice Joseph Story who, in turn, introduced him to some of the leading intellectuals of the day. He seemed to have no interest in politics, however, even proclaiming to Story, “[The] more I see of politics, the more I learn to love the law.”⁹

Sumner established a law practice in Boston, but it was legal scholarship that interested him. Encouraged by Story, he found great satisfaction in teaching at Harvard Law School. It was “in the calm study of my profession,” he told a colleague, that “I have ever taken more delight than in the pert debate at the bar.” In 1846 Sumner opposed the Mexican War, calling it a proslavery venture. Two years later, he became a founding member of the Free Soil Party. In 1851 the Massachusetts state legislature elected him to the U.S. Senate.¹⁰

Sumner’s early years in the Senate were not particularly remarkable, although he quickly gained a

reputation as an agitator. Tall and handsome, the freshman senator was considered to be eccentric, arrogant, and intimidating, but no one questioned his dedication to the cause of abolition. By 1856 Sumner's fame as a skilled and fiery orator was certainly growing, but he had yet to leave his mark on the Senate. That changed over the course of four days in May, when he delivered one of the most noteworthy speeches in Senate history, then suffered a vicious retaliation.

In the weeks leading up to the event, Sumner carefully composed his speech, a harsh and even startling attack on the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the men who supported it. He arranged for a printed edition of the speech, hoping to gain wider attention. By the time he entered the Senate Chamber on May 19, Sumner had studiously rehearsed and memorized every word of the address he entitled "The Crime Against Kansas." He spoke for five hours over two days. "Mr. President," he began, "A crime has been committed. . . . It is the rape of a virgin territory, compelling it to the hateful embrace of slavery."¹¹

In the speech, Sumner targeted two senators as key culprits in this crime. First, there was Stephen Douglas of Illinois, principal author of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Sumner considered Douglas to be a "noise-some, squat, and nameless animal . . . not a proper model for an American senator." And there was Andrew Butler of South Carolina, one of the few senators not present that day. Mocking the absent senator's stance as a man of southern chivalry, and using shockingly explicit and sexually charged language, Sumner accused Butler of taking "a mistress . . . who, though ugly to others, is always lovely to him; though polluted in the sight of the world, is chaste in his sight—I mean," Sumner emphasized, "the harlot, Slavery."¹²

The response to Sumner's address was immediate. Abolitionists viewed it as a triumph, but



Senator Charles Sumner. Library of Congress.

others expressed outrage. Senator Lewis Cass of Michigan termed it "the most un-American and unpatriotic [speech] that ever grated on the ears" of the Senate. Stephen Douglas, having borne the insults, commented, "That damn fool will get himself killed by some other damn fool." While Sumner's enemies fumed, his friends worried. Several colleagues offered to accompany him home—as body guards. He dismissed their fears as unwarranted.¹³

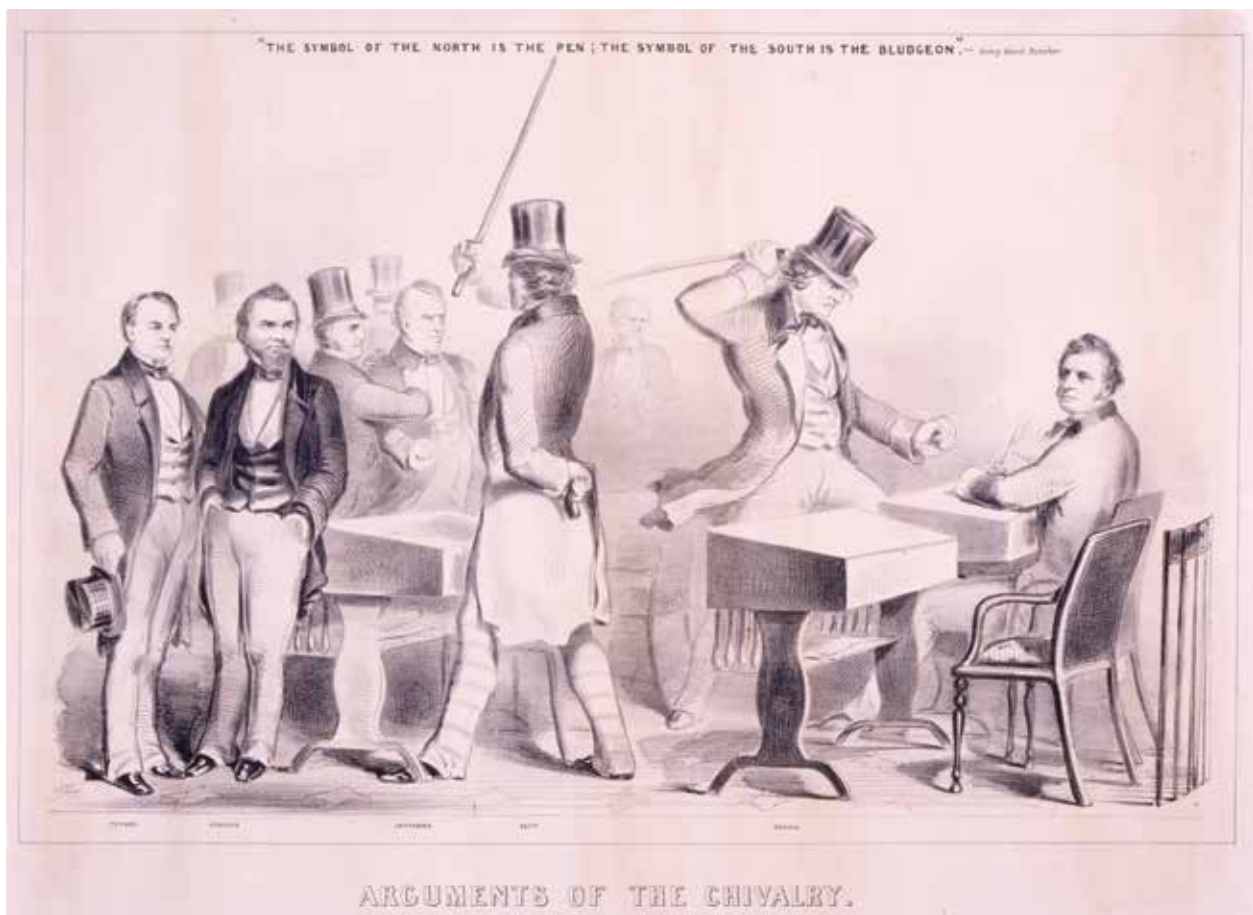
On May 22, after the Senate had adjourned for the day, Sumner sat at his Senate desk signing his postal frank to copies of the speech. As members strolled out of the Chamber, and visitors and bystanders dispersed, South Carolina representative Preston Brooks—a relative of Andrew Butler—entered the Chamber carrying a heavy gold-headed gutta-percha cane. The moment of brutal retaliation had arrived.

Approaching Sumner's desk in the mostly empty Chamber, Brooks declared, "I have read your speech" while raising his heavy walking stick. "It is a libel on South Carolina!" And down came the cane as Brooks repeatedly struck Sumner about the head and shoulders, inflicting nearly 40 wounds. Sumner raised his arms in defense and struggled to stand, but he only managed to rip loose the bolts that anchored his desk to the floor. The beating continued until the cane splintered and broke into pieces. The attack lasted barely a minute, but it left Sumner bleeding and unconscious.¹⁴

In the weeks that followed, Congress launched investigations into what became known as the "Brooks-Sumner Affair." Preston Brooks was indicted, convicted, and fined \$300. The House

threatened expulsion, prompting Brooks to resign. He was quickly reelected. Sumner became a hero to abolitionists in the North; Southerners lionized Brooks and presented him with new canes to replace the one he had broken on Sumner's head. Brooks didn't enjoy his fame for long. He returned to Congress in December, became ill, and died in January at the age of 38.

Charles Sumner returned to the Senate in February of 1857, but the beating left him with headaches, dizziness, and a nervous exhaustion that forced him back into convalescence. As the nation edged closer to war, Sumner's empty desk in the Senate Chamber served as a powerful sign that sectional tensions could no longer be resolved by political compromise.¹⁵



"Arguments of the Chivalry," depicting the caning of Senator Charles Sumner, 1856. Library of Congress.

Civil War Begins for the Senate

At 4:30 a.m. on April 12, 1861, Confederate troops fired on Fort Sumter in South Carolina's Charleston Harbor. Less than 34 hours later, Union forces surrendered. Traditionally, this event has been used to mark the beginning of the Civil War. In the Senate, however, the fall of Sumter was the latest in a series of events that culminated in war.

On November 6, 1860, Abraham Lincoln had been elected president by a strictly Northern vote. Four days later, on November 10, Senator James Chesnut, Jr., abandoned his Senate seat and returned home to South Carolina to draft an ordinance of secession. One day later, South Carolina's James Hammond also pledged to support the Confederacy "with all the strength I have."¹⁶

In the wake of these dramatic events, the Senate convened the second session of the 36th Congress on December 3, 1860. Vice President John Breckinridge, soon to be out of office, presided as the Senate chaplain offered a benediction. "Hear our petitions, and send us an answer of peace," prayed the Reverend Phineas Gurley. "May all bitterness and wrath" be put away, and may senators "deliberate . . . not as partisans, but as brethren and patriots, seeking the highest welfare . . . of the whole country. . . . Hear us . . . , and heal our land." The clerk then called the roll. Eleven Southern senators failed to answer.¹⁷

The secession crisis grew with each passing week, forcing the Senate to deal with vacant seats and diminishing quorums. When Mississippi voted to secede on January 9, 1861, Senator Jefferson Davis issued a warning. "If you desire at this last moment to avert civil war, so be it," he told his colleagues. "If you will not have it thus . . . , a war is to be inaugurated the like of which men have not seen." Six more senators were gone by the end of January, and three



Vice President and later Senator John Breckinridge.
U.S. Senate Historical Office.

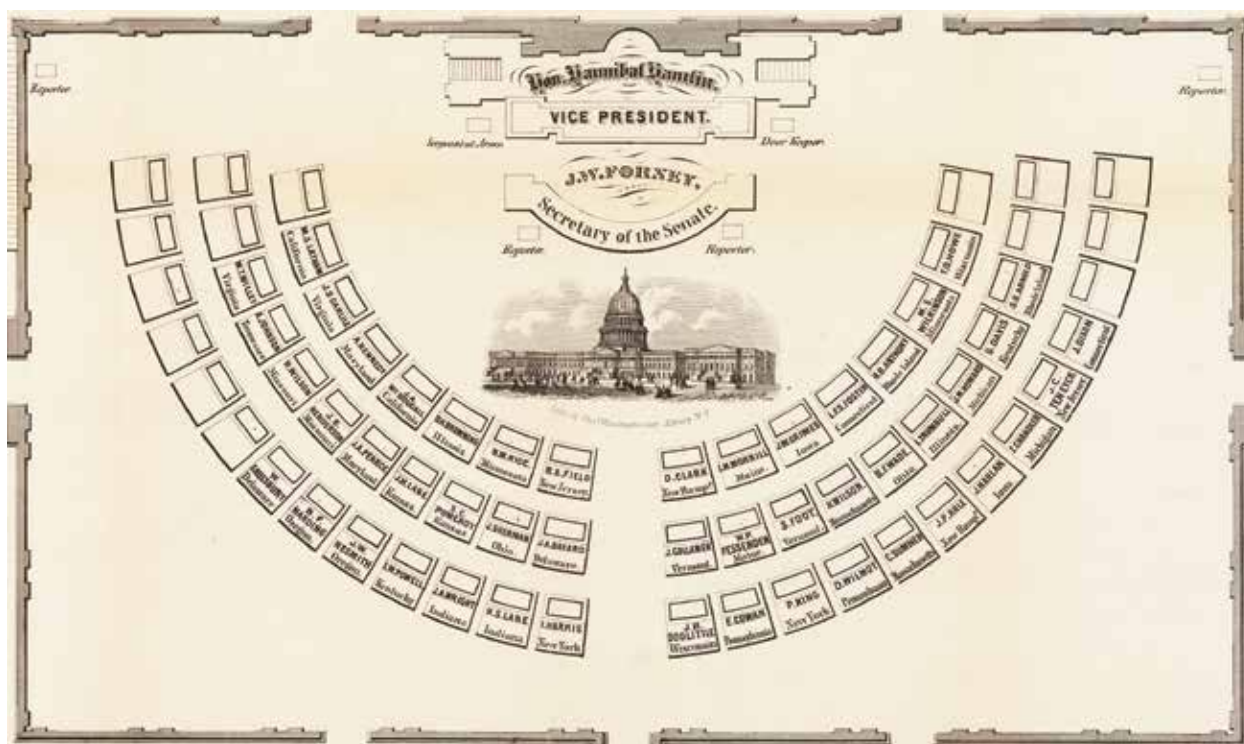
others left in February. Eventually, 25 of the Senate's 66 members left to support the Confederate cause. Even John Breckinridge, who had become a senator again in 1861, joined the Confederacy, although his state of Kentucky remained loyal to the Union.¹⁸

Long before Lincoln took the oath of office, and long before those fateful shots were fired at Fort Sumter, the Senate had faced its own civil war. Yet, it had managed to continue to fulfill its constitutional responsibilities, including passing important legislation such as an 1861 tariff bill that provided badly needed revenue. It established a Committee of Thirteen to consider peace proposals, including Senator John Crittenden's plan to extend to the Pacific Ocean the Missouri Compromise line dividing free from

slave states. While some senators hoped for a peaceful solution, others dismissed such efforts. Secession was not “merely political,” Senator Charles Sumner argued, it was “a revolution.” The era of compromise was gone and peace proposals failed.¹⁹

By the time Lincoln took office on March 4, 1861, rumors were circulating of a threatened Confederate attack at Fort Sumter. Northern members of Congress,

backed by an abolitionist press, demanded military action. “Reinforce Fort Sumter at all hazards” became the Northerners’ cry. Lincoln agreed to re-supply the fort, but with food rather than weapons. Fort Sumter fell. Now the lines were drawn, not only in the Senate, but across the nation. “Every man must be for the United States or against it,” proclaimed Senator Stephen Douglas. “There can be no neutrals in this war.”²⁰



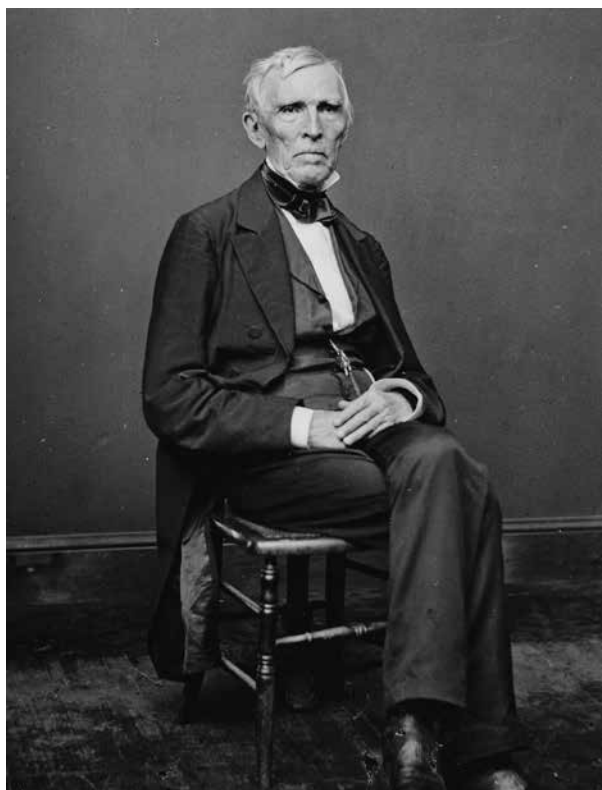
Seating chart showing the effect of secession on the Senate. *Congressional Directory*, 37th Congress, 3rd session, 1863.

Crittenden's Compromise

In December of 1860, following Abraham Lincoln's election, Southern senators began leaving the Senate to attend secession conventions. Northern senators called for military preparedness. The nation faced its greatest crisis. Was a peaceful solution to this crisis still possible? Could Congress take action to

avert civil war? One senator proposed just such a plan.

John Crittenden's political career began in 1811 when he was elected to the state legislature. Three years later, that body offered him a seat in the U.S. Senate, but the 27-year-old Kentuckian was too young to serve. In 1817 a Senate vacancy prompted



Senator John Crittenden. Library of Congress.

the state legislature to renew that offer. Over the next five decades, Crittenden served four separate terms in the Senate. Add to those 10 years as state legislator, four as attorney general, two as governor, and two years in the House of Representatives, and it adds up to nearly 40 years of public service. During the intervals when he was not in elected office, Crittenden established a reputation as one of the nation's most talented lawyers. In each of these endeavors, John Crittenden often served as conciliator, seeking middle ground between competing factions.

By December of 1860, the 74-year-old Crittenden was in his last term in the Senate. As the nation approached the precipice of war, Crittenden's allies turned to him to find a peaceful way to preserve the Union. "The best services of your best day will be needed as pacificator," insisted one colleague. On December 18, Crittenden submitted his peace

proposal to the Senate. "History is to record us," he warned. "Is it to record that when the destruction of the Union was imminent . . . we stood quarreling?" Crittenden argued that any successful proposal had to go beyond legislative action to offer a more permanent solution, so he proposed a collection of constitutional amendments. At the heart of the plan was an amendment to extend to the Pacific the line drawn by the now defunct 1820 Missouri Compromise, prohibiting slavery north of the 36°30' parallel. This sanctioned the continuation of slavery in the South, he admitted, but it also preserved the Union.²¹

Such a compromise over slavery seems unforgivable today, but during Crittenden's lifetime the legality—even the morality—of slavery was still debated. For decades, contentious battles over this issue had been mitigated by legislative compromise. As late as December of 1860, Crittenden hoped that one more compromise would keep the peace. His proposal was referred to a special committee, where it had the backing of some powerful senators, including William Seward of New York, but Radical Republicans like Iowa senator James Grimes, unwilling to accept Crittenden's solution, rejected it. This peace proposal—like many others—died in committee. Crittenden left the Senate in March of 1861 and returned to Kentucky, where his persuasive arguments against secession helped to keep that critical border state in the Union.

John Crittenden has been overshadowed by his more famous Kentucky colleague Henry Clay, and the Crittenden Compromise receives only brief attention in history textbooks, but both the man and the proposal were noteworthy. Crittenden's Compromise serves as a reminder that, even after secession began, war was not inevitable, abolition was anything but certain, and compromise—even over the most disputed issues—was still considered by many to be a viable option.²²

Jefferson Davis Bids Farewell

Early in the morning of January 21, 1861, anxious visitors crowded into the gallery of the Senate Chamber to hear the farewell address of a key Southern senator. The Senate convened at noon, the chaplain said a prayer, and soon all eyes turned to Jefferson Davis. Tall and gaunt, the 52-year-old Mississippian began speaking in a low, almost inaudible voice. “I rise, Mr. President . . . for the purpose of announcing . . . the state of Mississippi . . . has declared her separation from the United States.”²³

Born in Kentucky and raised in Mississippi, Davis was a wealthy cotton planter who enslaved well over 100 men and women, but he spent much of his life in service to the country he eventually betrayed. After graduating from West Point, Davis served a term in the House of Representatives, then commanded a regiment during the Mexican War. He became a senator in 1847. His close friend President Franklin Pierce appointed him secretary of war in 1853. As secretary, Davis expanded West Point, modernized the military’s arsenal, and convinced Congress to enlarge the nation’s standing army. As supervisor of the Army Corps of Engineers, he oversaw construction of the Capitol’s two new wings in the 1850s. He returned to the Senate in 1857, where he remained an unrelenting defender of slavery while witnessing the breakdown of nearly four decades of legislative compromises designed to calm sectional strife. Although he initially resisted calls for secession, in 1861 Davis concluded that secession was the only option for Southern states determined to maintain the institution of slavery.²⁴

Davis’s speech was not the only farewell address that day, but it remains the most notable. “I am sure I feel no hostility to you, senators from the North,” he said in a somber tone. “I am sure there is not one

of you, whatever sharp discussion there may have been between us, to whom I cannot now say, in the presence of my God, I wish you well.” As solemn visitors watched from the galleries, Davis concluded, “Having made the announcement which the occasion [requires] . . . it only remains for me to bid you a final adieu.” A month later, Jefferson Davis became president of the Confederacy. Captured by Union troops in 1865 and imprisoned for two years without trial, Davis returned home to Mississippi in 1867.²⁵



Senator Jefferson Davis. Library of Congress.

Unlike many of his allies, Davis never repented his role in the Confederacy, nor did he seek a post-war pardon to regain his rights of citizenship. “Tis been said that I should apply . . . for a pardon,” he commented in 1884, “but repentance must precede the right of pardon, and I have not repented.” In the aftermath of war, a Congress dominated by Union veterans

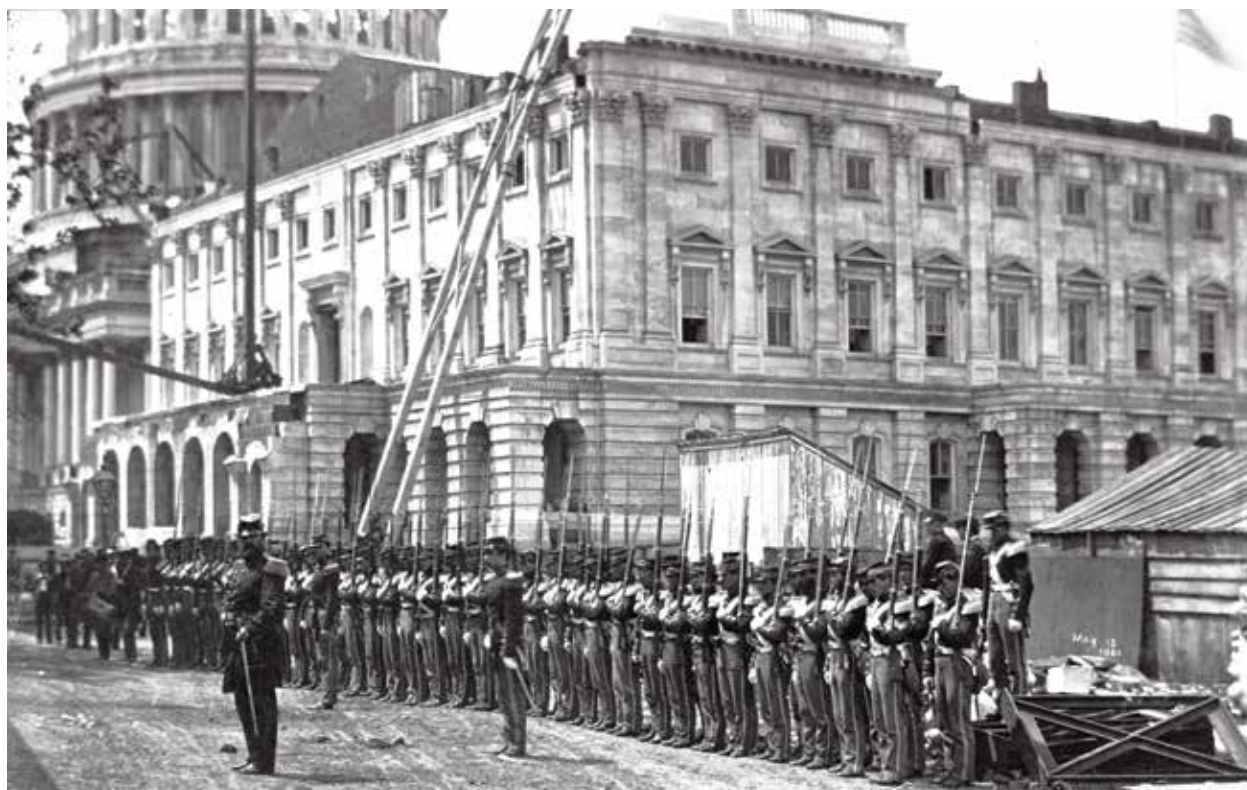
also saw no reason for clemency and excluded Davis from the general amnesty acts of the Reconstruction era. A century later, however, Congress was in a more forgiving mood. In 1977 Senator Mark Hatfield of Oregon introduced a resolution to restore citizenship rights posthumously to the Confederate leader. Passed by the Senate and the House, it became law in 1978.²⁶

The Senate’s Extraordinary Recess

The Fourth of July celebration began in typical fashion with a parade, but this was not a typical Fourth of July. To the accompaniment of blaring bands, 20,000 militiamen strode down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C. Spectators watched as troops gathered on Capitol grounds.

Everyone understood that enemy forces were just a day’s march away. At high noon on that Independence Day, Congress convened a rare summertime session. The year was 1861.²⁷

President Abraham Lincoln had called this emergency session just three days after the firing on



Union soldiers in front of the Capitol, 1861. Library of Congress.

Fort Sumter on April 12, but nearly three months passed before the Senate and House of Representatives occupied their Chambers in open session. Where was Congress during those crucial months? History books often answer that question with this simple statement: “Congress was in recess.” Although true, that statement is misleading. The Senate did adjourn on March 28, but during that fateful spring of 1861 senators were fully engaged in war-related activities.²⁸

On the evening of April 14, for example, just two days after the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter, Illinois senator Stephen Douglas met with his long-time political rival, Abraham Lincoln. Douglas advised Lincoln to call for troops, assured the president of his loyalty, and then launched a speaking tour through the Midwest to rally support for the Union case. “You all know that I am a very good partisan fighter,” he told the Illinois state legislature on April 25. “I trust you will find me equally a good patriot.” By the end of May, exhausted from his campaign, Douglas’s already fragile health failed. He died on June 3, 1861, just 48 years old.²⁹

John Sherman of Ohio had just started his Senate service when the war began, but he wasted no time in assuming his duties, even though the Senate was in recess. “Since my arrival,” he wrote to his brother William Tecumseh Sherman, “I have seen several officers, many citizens, and all the heads of departments.” Sherman worked tirelessly during these months to recruit enlistments for the militia, and he even served as an aide-de-camp in the Union army. By July he was tackling a great legislative challenge—how to finance a war with no money in the treasury.³⁰

Perhaps no one was busier than Zachariah Chandler of Michigan. He was among the first senators to call upon Lincoln, even before the inauguration, and the two men remained in frequent consultation. “Although entirely without military training,” wrote one biographer, “Chandler’s business experience, his

quick perception, and his clear judgment made his services at this period of confusion and mismanagement of great value” to Lincoln and the country. In April Chandler called for troops in Detroit, then greeted the First Regiment of Michigan Volunteers upon their arrival in Washington. He saw to the proper provision of uniforms, food, and supplies, mostly at his own personal expense. Later that month, he came under fire as he inspected military preparations at Fort Monroe, off the coast of Virginia.³¹



Senator Zachariah Chandler. Library of Congress.

These are only three examples among many. Contrary to popular perception and inadequate historical accounts, senators were not mere bystanders at any time during the Civil War. During these crucial early weeks of the war, they were engaged in rallying support, building a military, and crafting essential legislation. The textbooks are correct. The Senate was in recess during the spring of 1861, but it was no vacation.

Senators Witness the First Battle of Bull Run

The first land battle of the Civil War took place on July 21, 1861, just 30 miles from Washington, D.C.—near enough for senators to witness the battle in person. Southerners called it the Battle of Manassas, after a nearby town, while Northerners named it for a stream running through the battlefield, Bull Run.

After a Confederate artillery had fired on Fort Sumter in April of 1861, members of Congress complained about the Union army's inactivity. They traded rumors that President Abraham Lincoln was delaying military action in order to forge a compromise with the South. They demanded a quick campaign to prevent the new Confederate Congress from convening in Richmond, Virginia. Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* summed up this sentiment with repeated headlines that demanded: "Forward to Richmond!" Such outcries pressured

Lincoln to launch an offensive, which occurred at Bull Run.³²

On the morning of July 21, civilians from Washington, D.C., rode out to Centreville, Virginia, to watch a Union army made up of very green recruits march boldly into combat. Those recruits had volunteered for a 90-day war. Men, women, and even children came to witness the predicted Union victory, bringing along picnic baskets and opera glasses. Bull Run soon became known as the "picnic battle." Among the civilian ranks were some of Congress's most powerful senators—many of whom had called for just such a campaign. They quickly learned that war can be unpredictable.³³

The Union army performed well that morning, but by early afternoon the Confederates had brought in reinforcements, forcing an intense battle over a space known as Henry Hill. When Union gener-

als finally called retreat around four o'clock in the afternoon, their frightened soldiers fled for their lives. "I saw the Twelfth New York regiment rush pell-mell out of the wood," noted one observer. Soldiers threw down their weapons and ran from the battlefield, sweeping up civilians in the retreat.³⁴

Near the battlefield, a group of senators had gathered for lunch. They heard a loud noise and



"Battle of Bull Run, Va. July 21st 1861," Currier & Ives print. Library of Congress.

looked around to see the road filled with soldiers, horses, and wagons—all headed in the wrong direction. “Turn back, turn back, we’re whipped,” Union soldiers cried as they ran past the spectators. Startled, Michigan senator Zachariah Chandler tried to block the road to stop the retreat. Senator Benjamin Wade of Ohio, sensing a disastrous defeat, picked up a discarded rifle and threatened to shoot any soldier who ran. While Massachusetts senator Henry Wilson distributed sandwiches, a Confederate shell destroyed his buggy, forcing him to

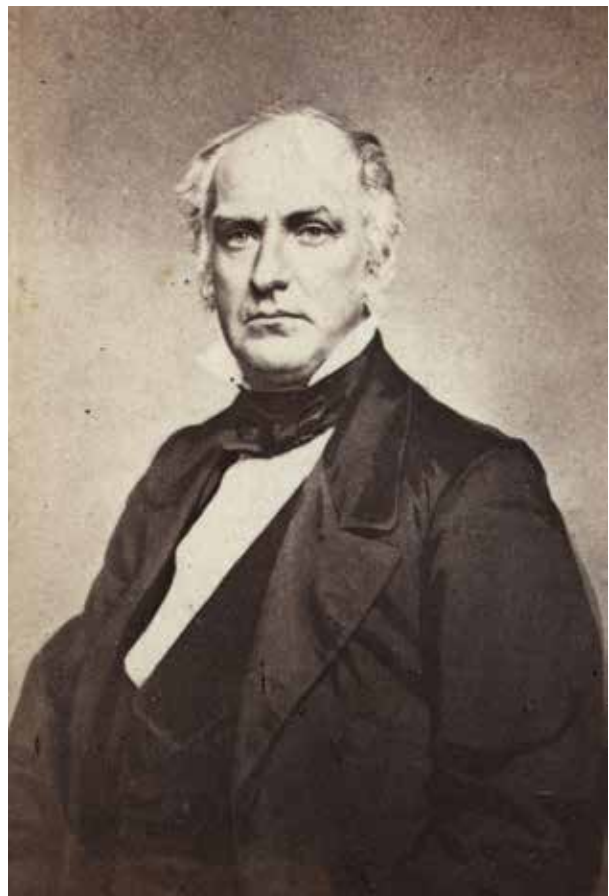
escape on a stray mule. Iowa senator James Grimes barely avoided capture and vowed never to go near another battlefield.³⁵

Senators returned to Washington “with gloomy faces,” noted one reporter, where they delivered eyewitness accounts to a stunned President Lincoln. The Union army’s defeat at Bull Run shocked and sobered members of Congress, making it painfully clear that the war would last much longer than 90 days and be harder fought than anyone had expected. It certainly would be no picnic.³⁶

The Death and Life of Edward Baker

On October 21, 1861, Senator Edward Baker died at the Battle of Ball’s Bluff. Baker’s tragic death is often noted in history books, but rarely described is the remarkable life that preceded that untimely death. Born in England in 1811, Baker immigrated with his family to the United States in 1816. They settled in Illinois, where Baker studied law and became a successful attorney, an associate of Stephen Douglas, a close friend of Abraham Lincoln, and a member of the Illinois state legislature. In 1844 he won a seat in the House of Representatives. Two years later, he resigned to serve in the Mexican War, then returned to Congress in 1849.

As the stormy decade of the 1850s began, Baker traveled west to the newly created state of California. He established a law practice and built a reputation as a talented politician and accomplished orator. When Oregon gained statehood in 1859, Baker was coaxed further north. Again, he became a prominent and popular figure in a new state. “Ned Baker is the most social, genial, good-natured, shrewd, brave,



Senator Edward Baker. Library of Congress.

popular man alive,” commented one reporter, “and he makes about the best speech, full of fun and pith.” Quickly, the Oregon state legislature elected him to the Senate. By December of 1860, Baker was back in Washington—as senator and as confidante to now president-elect Abraham Lincoln. When Lincoln took the oath of office on March 4, 1861, it was Baker who made the introduction.³⁷

The attack on Fort Sumter in April of 1861 brought many former soldiers back into military service, including Senator Baker. This time, he did not resign but remained a sitting senator while on active military duty. On August 1, 1861, as the Senate neared the end of its emergency session, Baker—in military uniform—spoke in the Senate Chamber. “It is our duty . . . to suppress insurrection; . . . to preserve . . . the liberty, lives, and property of the people.” It was his last Senate speech. Soon after, Senator Baker went to war.³⁸

On October 21, 1861, Baker and his regiment were ordered to assist in a minor reconnaissance mission that had begun the night before. Union troops had crossed the Potomac River just north of Washington, D.C., and proceeded north to Ball’s Bluff, Virginia, to determine whether Confederate forces had evacuated the nearby town of Leesburg. The Confederates had indeed left Leesburg, but they were still camped nearby. When Union troops climbed the high riverside bluffs, Confederate troops attacked.

Baker arrived at Ball’s Bluff after the fighting had begun. Unable to gather reinforcements, and ignoring advice to retreat or move further inland, he and his troops came under heavy enemy fire. Baker was shot five times. One bullet pierced his heart. He died quickly as his troops retreated back over the 70-foot cliffs to the river below. Many were shot. Others drowned. Shocked by the defeat, and grieved by Baker’s death, Congress created the

Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, determined to investigate the loss and become more involved in wartime decisions.³⁹

Edward Baker retains the distinction of being the only sitting senator to die in military combat, but this sad statistic often overshadows what came before. Baker was a skilled lawyer, a renowned orator, a dedicated statesman, and a member of Lincoln’s inner circle of advisors. He should be remembered for his life as well as his death.⁴⁰



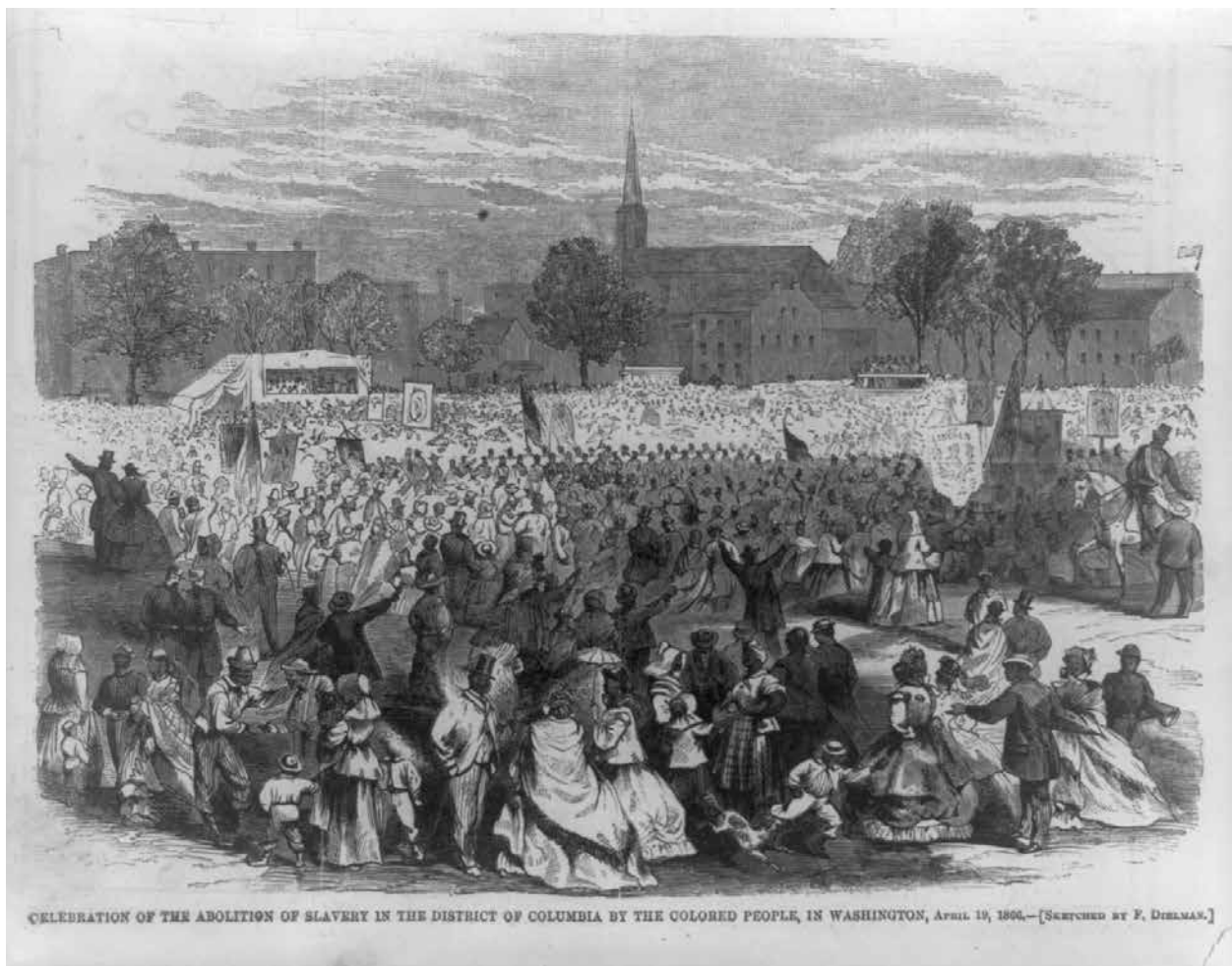
“Death of Col. Edward D. Baker, at the Battle of Ball’s Bluff near Leesburg Va. Oct. 21st 1861,” Currier & Ives print. Library of Congress.

Henry Wilson and the Compensated Emancipation Act of 1862

Massachusetts senator Henry Wilson enjoyed a long and distinguished career marked by many important milestones, but few more important than the passage of the Compensated Emancipation Act of 1862. After a childhood marked by poverty and then training as a cobbler, Wilson became politically active in the 1830s as calls for abolition of slavery grew louder. He joined the Senate in 1855 and stayed for 18 years, followed by two

years as vice president to Ulysses S. Grant. All through those turbulent years of war and Reconstruction, Wilson championed the rights of African Americans.

In 1861, as civil war began, Wilson introduced legislation to emancipate slaves in Delaware and Maryland, but those efforts failed. Most lawmakers believed that only the states had the constitutional power to abolish slavery within their borders. Wilson then turned his attention to the District of Columbia.



"Celebration of the Abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia by the Colored People, in Washington, April 19, 1866," by Frederick Dielman, May 12, 1866. Library of Congress.

There, Congress had clearer legislative control, but earlier efforts dating back to the 1830s had all failed. In December Wilson presented a bill to abolish slavery in the nation's capital by compensating slave owners an average of \$300 for the loss of each enslaved person they considered as their property. This would “transform three thousand personal chattels into freemen,” Wilson promised, and would obliterate “oppressive, odious, and hateful laws” known as black codes.⁴¹

Winter turned to spring as the Senate debated Wilson's bill. Freepersons will become “a burden . . . upon the white population,” Senator Garrett Davis of Kentucky complained. Lazarus Powell, also of Kentucky, argued that the Supreme Court had decided that “there is property in slaves,” and that this bill would “deprive the people of the District of

Columbia of their property.” Arguments were combative and even belligerent, but Wilson persevered.⁴²

On April 3, 1862, the Senate voted 29 to 14 to pass the D.C. Compensated Emancipation Act. Charles Sumner declared it to be the “first installment of that great debt which we all owe to an enslaved race.” Not “a slave exists” in D.C., announced the *Hartford Daily Courant*. “Their shackles have fallen, never to be restored.” The House approved the emancipation bill on April 11, and it was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln on April 16, 1862. Following enactment of the law, commissioners approved more than 930 petitions, granting freedom to 2,989 enslaved men, women, and children. Today, District of Columbia residents continue to observe Emancipation Day every April 16, although Wilson's role in passing that bill is mostly forgotten.⁴³

Clara Barton's Benefactor

When President Abraham Lincoln issued a call for volunteers on April 15, 1861, the first group of soldiers to arrive was the 6th Massachusetts Regiment. Attacked by Confederate sympathizers in Baltimore as they traveled to Washington, D.C., they arrived at the Capitol bloodied and bruised and were housed in the Senate Chamber. Among those aiding the soldiers was a young woman, a former government clerk named Clara Barton. Thus began a career that culminated in the creation of the American Red Cross in 1881. This is a familiar tale, but less known is the essential role played in this story by Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, who chaired the Senate Committee on Military Affairs.⁴⁴

Clara Barton, also from Massachusetts, began her professional career as a teacher before gaining employment as a Patent Office clerk—among the first

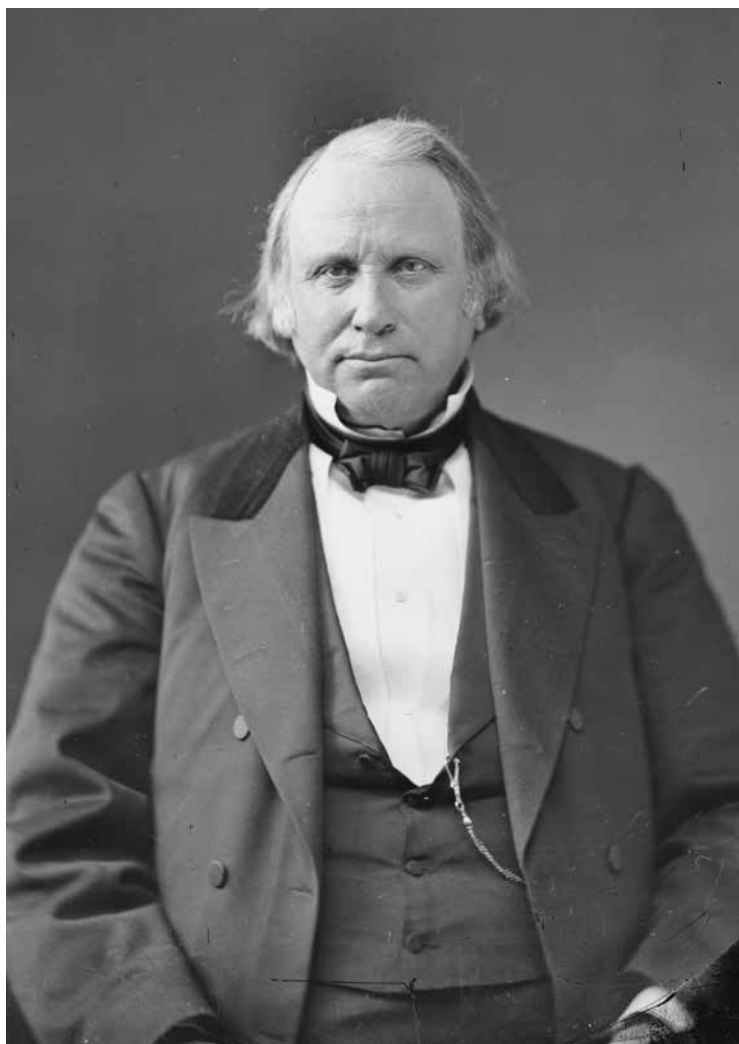


Clara Barton. Library of Congress.

women to hold such a post. She lost that position in 1857 when growing opposition to women in government jobs prompted the James Buchanan administration to remove women from clerkships. When Lincoln took office in 1861, Barton again sought federal employment—but the war intervened. When the Massachusetts soldiers crowded into the Senate Chamber on April 19, Wilson and Barton were among those on the scene. While Barton nursed the wounded, Wilson sought medical supplies and provided food and clothing. As they became an effective team, Clara Barton found more than a job—she discovered a vocation and a true friend in Henry Wilson.⁴⁵

By late 1861, having witnessed the unpreparedness of the Army Medical Department, Barton won approval from Chairman Wilson to create her own private distribution center for medical supplies. In 1862, again with Wilson's support, Barton took her work directly to the battlefields—including Manassas, Antietam, and Fredericksburg. She had no formal training, but Barton skillfully assisted battlefield surgeons and tended to the sick and dying. Through it all, Wilson's support never lagged. At Fredericksburg Barton met wounded soldiers in desperate living conditions. There was "one man who would set it right," she wrote in her diary. Wilson soon arrived on the scene, sent for supplies, and launched an investigation. "Every man who left Fredericksburg," Barton wrote, "owes it to the firm decision of one man," Henry Wilson.⁴⁶

As the war drew to a close in 1865, Barton tackled the issue of missing soldiers. Again, she turned to Wilson, who consulted the president. On March



Senator Henry Wilson. Library of Congress.

11, through presidential authority, Barton established the Missing Soldiers Office. Over the next four years, she searched for the missing, located and identified graves, and published long lists of casualties, bringing sad but vital information to families of lost soldiers.⁴⁷

The ordeal of the Civil War forged many bonds in Washington. One of the most remarkable was the partnership of Barton and Wilson. Clara Barton's crusading work transformed the profession of nursing and brought her many well-deserved accolades. Equally important was the steadfast support of her friend and benefactor, Henry Wilson.

The Trent Affair

As Abraham Lincoln became president and the 37th Congress convened in March of 1861, the Republican Party assumed majority control of the Senate for the first time. Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner became chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. Over the next several years, Sumner's influence on Lincoln's foreign policy was often decisive and even steered the course of the Civil War. This was certainly the case in late 1861, when an incident known as the "Trent Affair" nearly provoked war with Great Britain.

On November 8, 1861, Union captain Charles Wilkes, in command of the USS *San Jacinto*, stopped the British mail steamer *Trent* off the coast of the Bahamas and removed by force two of its passengers. Those passengers were former senators James Murray Mason of Virginia and John Slidell of Louisiana, now members of the Confederacy. En route to England on a diplomatic mission, Mason and Slidell sought full recognition of the Confederate government by Great Britain, which had declared its neutrality in the U.S. Civil War.

The seizure and arrest of the two Confederate leaders brought outrage from the British government. It appears "that certain individuals have been forcibly taken from on board a British vessel, the ship of a neutral power," declared Britain's foreign secretary. "The United States must be fully aware [that Britain cannot] allow such an affront to the national honor to pass without full reparation." He demanded an apology and release of the



Charles Sumner, by Walter Ingalls, 1873. U.S. Senate Collection.

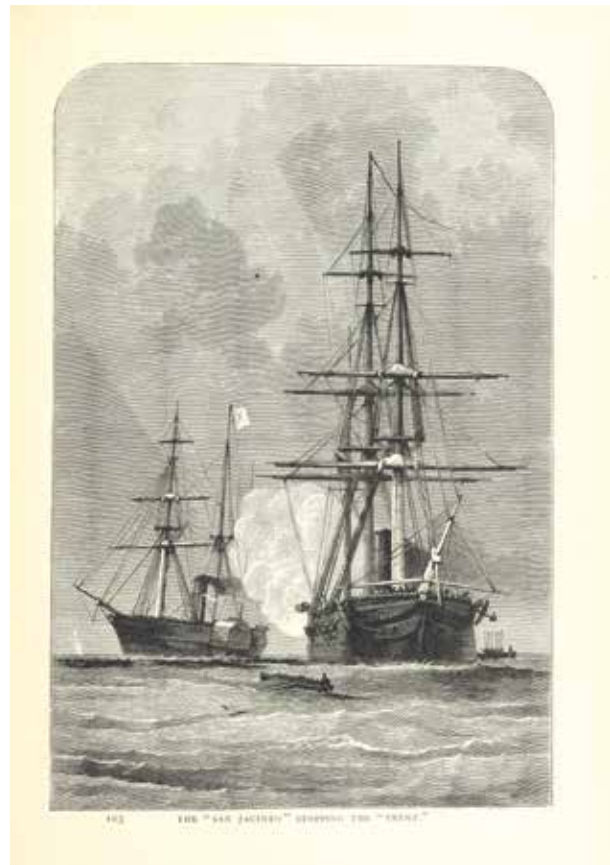
captives. Failure to do so, he warned, could lead to armed conflict.⁴⁸

In the United States, Northern response to the incident was jubilant. Captain Wilkes was declared a hero by Secretary of War Gideon Welles and was hailed for his quick action by Secretary of State William Seward. The House of Representatives suggested a gold medal. When word of the seizure reached the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, however, Charles Sumner's response was a cautious warning: "We will have to give them up."⁴⁹

For six tense weeks, as the crisis continued, Sumner carefully investigated the legality of Wilkes's

actions and sought a diplomatic solution to avoid yet another war. In the Senate, many of his colleagues argued that a surrender of the Confederate diplomats would undermine the Union effort, but Sumner persisted. Finally, in late December, after weeks of debate and frequent meetings between Sumner and Lincoln's cabinet, the president agreed to release the prisoners. Sumner had prevailed. The crisis was over. Now, he had to convince the broader public of the wisdom of this decision.

On January 9, 1862, as foreign diplomats watched from the Senate Chamber galleries, Sumner delivered a speech carefully calculated to stir American sentiments. He compared Captain Wilkes's action with the hated British practice of impressing seamen that had led to war in 1812 and argued that Americans adhered to a higher standard. Our government does not "stoop to conquer," he insisted. "It simply lifts itself to the height of its own original principles." Sumner was persuasive. Thanks in good part to his efforts, further conflict was averted, and Great Britain continued to maintain its neutrality in the American war.⁵⁰



The USS *San Jacinto*, right, stops the RMS *Trent*. Illustration from *The Youth's History of the United States, etc.*, by Edward Sylvester Ellis, 1887.

The Prayer of One Hundred Thousand

Throughout his Senate career, Charles Sumner of Massachusetts was the Senate's most committed crusader for abolition and civil rights. When President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, Sumner praised Lincoln's action but quickly added that the presidential proclamation did not go far enough. Only national abolition, immune from action by the states or the courts, could guarantee an end to the heinous institution—and that meant a constitutional amendment. To promote Senate approval of what

would become the Thirteenth Amendment, Sumner formed a unique alliance with members of the Women's National Loyal League.

Created by stalwart reformers Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, the Women's National Loyal League held its first convention in May of 1863 and began a campaign to collect one million signatures on a petition demanding a constitutional amendment for the total abolition of slavery. To receive this and other petitions, Sumner asked the Senate to create a special committee "to take



Elizabeth Cady Stanton, seated, and Susan B. Anthony.
Library of Congress.

into consideration all propositions . . . concerning slavery.” The Senate complied, then named Sumner as chairman.⁵¹

While Sumner stoked the fires of reform in Washington, the women of the National Loyal League diligently collected signatures. From town after town, state after state, petitions arrived, bringing hundreds, then thousands of signatures. By early 1864, the first set of 100,000 signatures was ready for presentation. Never one to miss a moment of high drama, Charles Sumner entered the Senate Chamber on February 9, 1864, accompanied by two African American men who carried a pair of massive steamer trunks filled with petitions. “Mr. President, I offer a

petition . . . signed by one hundred thousand men and women,” Sumner began. “They are from all parts of the country. . . . They are from the . . . educated and the uneducated, rich and poor, of every profession, business, and calling.” Presenting the petitions, he proclaimed, “Here they are, a mighty army, one hundred thousand strong. . . . They ask for nothing less than universal emancipation.”⁵²

This Sumner speech became known as the “Prayer of One Hundred Thousand.” Two months later, on April 8, 1864, the Senate passed the Thirteenth Amendment—the crucial first step towards constitutional abolition.⁵³

The Prayer of One Hundred Thousand.

SPEECH OF HON. CHAR. SUMNER ON THE PRESENTATION OF THE FIRST
INSTALLMENT OF THE EMANCIPATION PETITION OF THE
WOMEN'S NATIONAL LEAGUE.

In the Senate of the United States, Tuesday, February 9th, 1864.

Mr. SUMNER.—Mr. President: I offer a petition which is now lying on the desk before me. It is too bulky for me to take up. I need not add that it is too bulky for any of the pages of this body to carry.

This petition marks a stage of public opinion in the history of slavery, and also in the suppression of the rebellion. As it is short I will read it:

TO THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED STATES:

The undersigned, women of the United States above the age of eighteen years, earnestly pray that your honorable body will pass at the earliest practicable day an act emancipating all persons of African descent held to involuntary service or labor in the United States.

There is also a duplicate of this petition signed by "men above the age of eighteen years."

It will be perceived that the petition is in rolls. Each roll represents a State. For instance, here is New York with a list of seventeen thousand seven hundred and six names; Illinois with fifteen thousand three hundred and eighty; and Massachusetts with eleven thousand six hundred and forty-one. But I will read the abstract with which I have been furnished:

State.	Men.	Women.	Total.
New York	6,519	11,187	17,706
Illinois	6,382	8,998	15,380
Massachusetts	4,248	7,392	11,641
Pennsylvania	2,259	6,366	8,625
Ohio	3,676	4,654	8,330
Michigan	1,741	4,441	6,182
Iowa	2,923	4,014	6,939
Maine	1,225	4,362	5,587
Wisconsin	1,539	4,391	5,930
Indiana	1,075	3,591	4,666
New Hampshire	393	2,261	2,654
New Jersey	824	1,709	2,533
Rhode Island	827	1,451	2,278
Vermont	375	1,183	1,558
Connecticut	398	1,192	1,590
Minnesota	396	1,094	1,490
West Virginia	82	100	182
Maryland	113	50	163
Kansas	84	74	158
Delaware	67	29	96
Nebraska	13	20	33
Kentucky	21	1	22
Louisiana (New Orleans)	14	1	15
Citizens of the United States living in New Brunswick	19	17	36
Total	34,399	65,601	100,000

First page of Charles Sumner's 1864 "Prayer of One Hundred Thousand" speech. Library of Congress.

Constructing a National Symbol

The iconic image of the Capitol dome is so familiar to us today that it's hard to imagine the Capitol without it, but the dome is a relative newcomer. Construction on the Capitol began in 1793, and the original dome, a wooden structure covered in copper, was completed in 1824. Between 1824 and 1850, the United States acquired vast territories that produced additional states, each sending new members to Congress. By the early 1850s, the House and Senate had outgrown their legislative chambers, prompting members to authorize the construction of two new wings for the Capitol. Before long, the original small dome looked out of place. In 1854 Capitol architect Thomas U. Walter designed a new dome, inspired by the great cathedrals of Europe, to be constructed of fireproof cast iron. Construction began in 1856, and Washingtonians watched in wonder as the massive new structure took shape. On March 4, 1861, when Abraham Lincoln took the presidential oath of office, a half-finished dome loomed over the Capitol.

The attack on Fort Sumter in April of 1861 transformed Washington, D.C., into an armed camp. As Union soldiers arrived and occupied the Capitol, cast iron produced for construction of the dome was quickly converted for use in fortifying the building, prompting Capitol engineer Montgomery C. Meigs to order contractors to cease all construction. The government “has no money to spend except in self defense,” he explained. Despite Meigs’s order, the company of Janes, Fowler and Kirtland—iron workers contracted to build the dome—continued the work. If construction stopped, they feared, the cast iron could be lost or damaged. And so workers stayed on the job—without pay. “It seemed a strange contradiction to see the workmen . . . going on with their

labor,” wrote a *New York Times* reporter; “the click of the chisel, the stroke of the hammer,” blending with “the tramp of the battalions drilling in the [Capitol] corridors.” As Thomas Walter recalled, thanks to the workers’ dedication, “The sound of the hammer” never stopped “during all of our civil troubles.”⁵⁴

In 1862 Congress reconsidered the construction project. “Every consideration of economy, . . . of protection to this building, . . . of expediency requires that [construction] should be completed,” argued Senator Solomon Foot of Vermont. The Union was strong enough, he insisted, “to put down this rebellion and to put up this our Capitol at the same time.” In May of 1862, a year after workers had decided to carry on, Congress renewed the contract for construction.⁵⁵



Capitol dome under construction, 1861. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

As war progressed, so did the dome, section by section. Skilled and unskilled laborers—some of whom began the project as enslaved men, then continued as freedmen following passage of the 1862 Compensated Emancipation Act—operated machinery under dangerous conditions. Accidents and injuries were common. And yet, the sight of this unceasing operation in the midst of war proved to be inspiring, even to President Lincoln. “If people see the Capitol going on,” he remarked late in 1863, “it is a sign we intend the Union shall go on.”⁵⁶

At noon on December 2, 1863, a solemn ceremony marked completion of the dome’s structure and the placement of the Statue of Freedom. “I shall always identify Washington with that huge . . . towering bulge of pure white,” exclaimed Walt Whitman, that “vast eggshell, built of iron and glass . . . a beauty and [a] genuine success.” Completed against all odds during an era of tragic and violent disunion, the Capitol dome became a lasting symbol of a nation both strong and unified.⁵⁷

William Pitt Fessenden and Wartime Finance

Maine’s William Pitt Fessenden, known to friends and colleagues as “Pitt,” was born out of wedlock in 1806. Despite this inauspicious beginning, Fessenden proved to be a smart and resourceful young man. He graduated from Bowdoin College at age 17, but the college withheld his diploma for a year—not due to his youth, but rather because he had been “guilty of profane swearing.” That didn’t stop him from pursuing law, however, and his dedication to the cause of abolition led him into politics. After service in the state legislature and the U.S. House of Representatives, Fessenden came to the Senate in 1854.⁵⁸

Fessenden arrived in the Senate at the start of a bitter three-month debate over the Kansas-Nebraska Act, or as colleague Charles Sumner later said, “In the midst of that terrible debate . . . by which the country was convulsed to its center.” Within days of taking office, Fessenden delivered his maiden speech, a powerful denunciation of the controversial bill. Quickly becoming known, in Stephen Douglas’s words, as the Senate’s “readiest and ablest debater,” Fessenden accurately predicted that if the



Senator William Pitt Fessenden. National Archives.

Kansas-Nebraska Act passed, opening the western territories to slavery, it would set North and South on a course toward disunion.⁵⁹

That crisis came in 1861. While three of his four sons fought for the Union army—one of whom died at Bull Run—Pitt Fessenden chaired the Senate Finance Committee. He worked long hours under tremendous pressure to write the legislation that funded the war. In this and other duties, Fessenden often provided a cautious voice to counterbalance the demands of his more radical colleagues. For three years, Fessenden tempered Treasury Secretary Salmon Chase's demand for greenbacks and deficit spending by favoring a "pay as you go" system designed to replenish the treasury through tariff and tax manipulation. "It is time for us . . . to think a little more about the money!" became the senator's mantra. When he reluctantly left the Senate in 1864 to serve as Treasury secretary, Fessenden found the federal coffers nearly empty but skillfully

negotiated a bond issue to raise the funds necessary to conclude the war.⁶⁰

By war's end, when he returned to the Senate, Fessenden had become a leader and a statesman, respected by radicals and conservatives. Remaining a practical conservative in a Senate dominated by Radical Republicans, Fessenden often demonstrated a resolute independence from partisan fervor. Characteristically, in 1868, although he disliked President Andrew Johnson, Pitt Fessenden used his influence during Johnson's impeachment trial to gain the president's acquittal.⁶¹

As a quiet but hardworking senator who concentrated on fiscal and monetary policy, Pitt Fessenden failed to attract the widespread attention bestowed upon more colorful or controversial colleagues, but lack of notoriety does not diminish his legacy. Sometimes, the most important senators turn out to be least famous.

Senators and the Reconstruction Amendments

In the waning months of the Civil War, senators understood that their work of providing civil and political rights to a formerly enslaved population was only just beginning. Slavery as an institution would end, but its lingering effects would endure. How to mitigate those effects and empower the African American population with political and civil rights became the focus of a group of dedicated reformers.

As early as 1863, senators and their allies in the House of Representatives were setting the stage for what became the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments. They had applauded Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation but believed the wartime measure did not go far enough. Instead, they sought

constitutional amendments to guarantee freedom and rights of citizenship. For this select group of senators, winning the war was not just a military victory, it was a political transformation.

In the Senate, no one had worked harder for abolition than Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner, but the fate of what became the Thirteenth Amendment rested in another man's hands—Illinois senator Lyman Trumbull. When Sumner became chairman of the new Senate Committee on Slavery and Freedmen in late 1863, he hoped that all proposals for abolition would come before him. With that in mind, in February of 1864 he introduced a constitutional amendment to establish "equality before the law,"

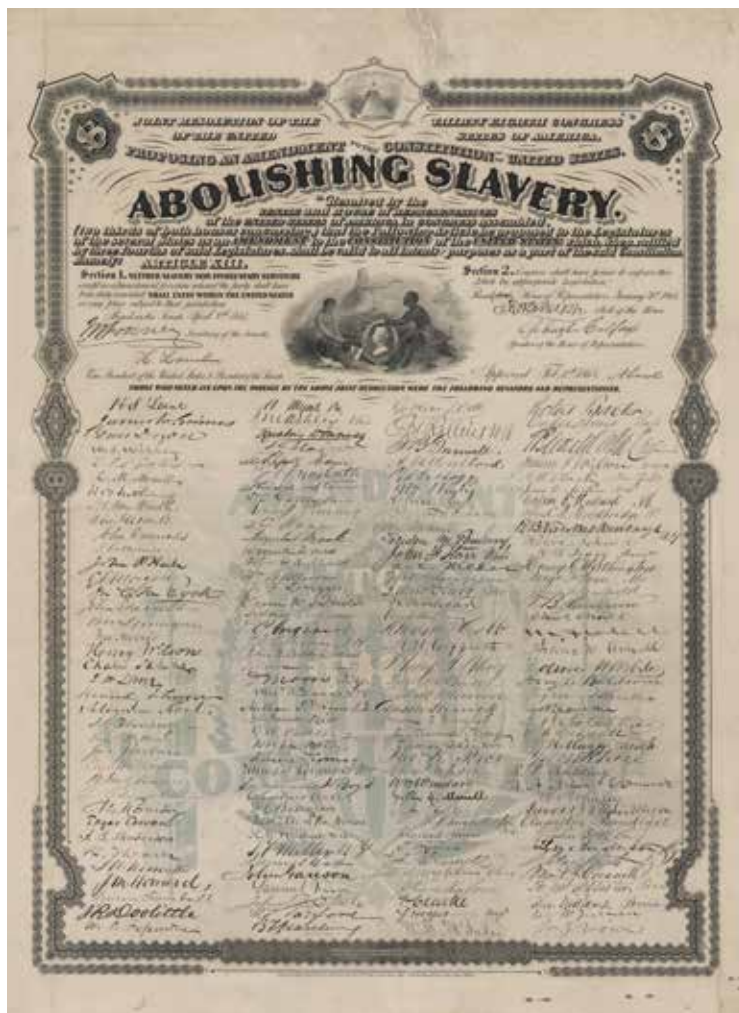
asking that it be referred to his committee. The Senate denied his request. Lyman Trumbull, chairman of the Judiciary Committee, insisted that his committee was the proper forum for consideration of all such proposals, and the Senate agreed. Sumner's dogged agitation for abolition and civil rights stirred action but also made enemies. Fearing that any association with Sumner could undermine success, supporters of an abolition amendment preferred to give the task of managing the bill to the less volatile Trumbull.⁶²

By January of 1864, the Judiciary Committee had debated and drafted several proposed amendments. Sumner's draft, with its insistence on absolute

equality, was rejected. Making all persons "equal before the law," argued one senator, might lead to dangerous consequences, such as providing voting rights to women. Instead, the committee approved a version that included more modest language echoing the Northwest Ordinance of 1787: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States."⁶³

On February 10, 1864, Trumbull reported the amendment out of committee, and a full debate among senators began. Fears of race-mixing and social upheaval—issues that figured prominently in the later House debate—were largely absent. Rather, senators argued over the constitutionality of uncompensated emancipation, the nature of federalism, and the propriety of adopting the first constitutional amendment in more than 60 years. A few radicals sought ways to empower the freedmen with civil and economic rights, but most senators agreed that abolition alone was the goal. "We give the [black man] no right except his freedom," explained Missouri senator John Henderson. "[We] leave the rest to the states."⁶⁴

On April 8, 1864, the Senate took the first step toward the constitutional abolition of slavery. With Southern Democrats still absent, a strong coalition of 30 Republicans, four border-state Democrats, and four Union Democrats joined forces to pass the Thirteenth Amendment by a vote of 38 to 6. In the months that followed, two test votes failed in the House of Representatives, and the amendment was sidelined by the national election of 1864. Then, in December of 1864, representatives meeting in a lame-duck session agreed to renew



Broadside displaying signatures of members of Congress who voted to approve the proposed amendment abolishing slavery, 1865. Library of Congress.



Senator Lyman Trumbull. Library of Congress.

the debate, which dragged contentiously on through January. The House passed the amendment on January 31. Ratified by the states on December 6, 1865, the amendment abolished slavery “within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”⁶⁵

The road to Senate passage of the Thirteenth Amendment was forged by many, but it was Lyman Trumbull who achieved the final goal. Others had proposed constitutional amendments to abolish slavery, but Trumbull’s efforts to amend, perfect, and build support for an amendment proved essential. “Only slavery prohibited by an amendment to the Constitution,” Trumbull argued, “will make sure that no state or Congress could ever restore slavery.”⁶⁶

With passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, the stage was set for further reform with other senators taking the leading role. Senator Jacob Howard of Michigan—known as “Honest Jake”—joined the Senate in 1862 and fought hard to extend political

rights to African Americans. As a member of the Joint Committee of Fifteen on Reconstruction, he backed the Thirteenth Amendment and then served as floor manager for the Fourteenth Amendment, which granted citizenship to all formerly enslaved men and women and gave them “equal protection under the laws.” This amendment “establishes equality before the law,” Howard explained, “and it gives to the humblest, the poorest, the most despised of the race the same rights and the same protection before the law as it gives to the most powerful, the most wealthy, or the most haughty. That . . . is republican government, as I understand it, and the only one which can claim the praise of a just Government.” On June 8, 1866, the Senate approved the Fourteenth Amendment, 33 to 11. It gained ratification in 1868.⁶⁷

William Stewart, gold miner turned lawyer, became one of Nevada’s first two senators in 1865. It was Stewart who wrote the final, decisive draft of the Fifteenth Amendment to extend suffrage rights to African American men, and he then served as floor manager to assure its passage. “This amendment is a declaration to make all men, without regard to race or color, equal before the law,” Stewart explained in the final days of debate. “The arguments in favor of it are so numerous, so convincing, that they carry conviction to every mind.” The Senate passed the Fifteenth Amendment, 39 to 13, on February 26, 1869. It was ratified a year later.⁶⁸

These three senators—Lyman Trumbull, Jacob Howard, and William Stewart—never achieved the fame and notoriety of their crusading colleagues, but their legislative skills proved essential to passage of the Civil War and Reconstruction amendments. Their success established a constitutional foundation on which the modern civil rights movement was built.



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CHAPTER 4

Landmark Moments in Senate History

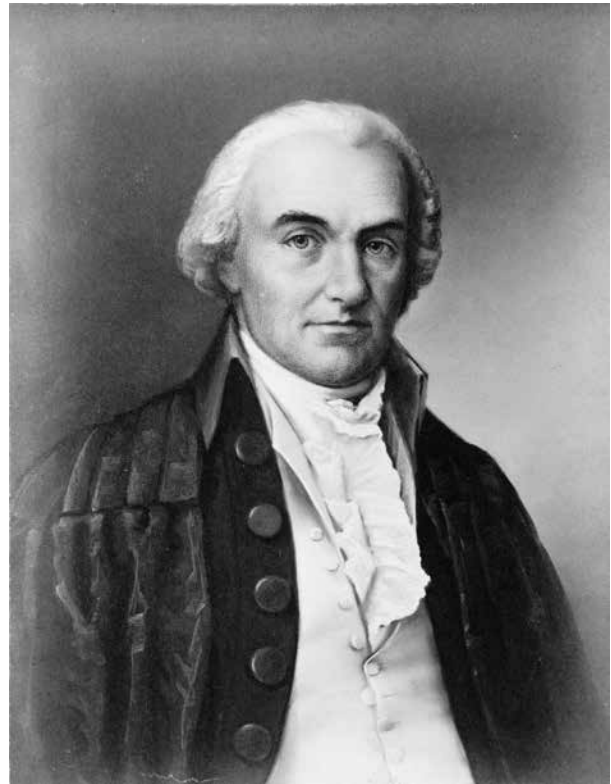


The Senate Passes the Judiciary Act

On April 7, 1789, just one day after achieving its very first quorum, the Senate turned to a most important task—fulfilling the promises of the framers of the Constitution. To gain ratification, the pro-Constitution Federalists had assured state conventions that the new Congress would address the concerns of the Antifederalists, including consideration of a Bill of Rights and the creation of a well-defined judiciary. As the First Congress convened, the responsibility for drafting a Bill of Rights fell to the House of Representatives, while the task of establishing a judiciary rested with the Senate.

Article III of the Constitution provided that the “judicial Power of the United States, shall be vested in one supreme Court, and in such inferior Courts as the Congress may . . . ordain and establish.” Beyond that, it said little about the nature or the scope of a federal judiciary. At the 1787 convention in Philadelphia, opposition had arisen over such issues as state sovereignty and individual liberties. Fearing opposition might doom the convention, the framers postponed further debate. As one legal scholar noted, they “left the details of form and content to congressional discretion.”¹

To iron out those details, the Senate appointed a committee and named as chairman a man well suited to the task—Oliver Ellsworth of Connecticut. It was Ellsworth who had devised a national appellate court under the Articles of Confederation, and it was Ellsworth who had helped to draft the crucial “Connecticut Compromise” at the Constitutional Convention, resulting in a bicameral Congress with equal representation in the Senate. By the time he became one of Connecticut’s first two senators, Ellsworth was widely respected for his ability to solve difficult problems by forging consensus. As a



Senator Oliver Ellsworth. Library of Congress.

biographer wrote, Ellsworth “was an immensely practical politician who thoroughly understood the art of political dealmaking.”²

Ellsworth worked closely with committee members to draft a bill that could gain approval. To inform their decisions, senators sought guidance from the nation’s foremost lawyers and legal scholars. This expert advice came in the form of correspondence rather than testimony, but in essence, the committee conducted the equivalence of a modern Senate hearing. “Anxious to avoid a hostile reception,” explained one historian, senators “paid close attention to the concerns of those who offered advice.” This remarkable correspondence—a treasure trove for historians—greatly shaped the final bill.³

On July 17, 1789, the Senate passed the Judiciary Act. Becoming law two months later, after further tinkering by the House of Representatives, the Judiciary Act provided for a chief justice and five associate justices for the Supreme Court. Ellsworth's plan established a district court for each state and assigned it to one of three circuits. A district judge and two Supreme Court justices presided over circuit courts, the primary trial courts in the federal system. Seven years later, in recognition of his dedicated service, the Senate confirmed Oliver Ellsworth as the nation's third chief justice.⁴

The Judiciary Act was a carefully designed compromise that balanced the concerns of those who favored a powerful federal authority with those who opposed federal courts as an imposition on state sovereignty. It acknowledged the legitimacy of state courts while assuring the supremacy of the federal judiciary. Considered by constitutional scholars to be "the keystone of American federalism," the Judiciary Act was the Senate's artful but practical fulfillment of one of the lofty promises of the Constitution's framers.⁵

The Uproar over Jay's Treaty

Angry editorials filled newspapers. Senators were accosted on the street. In Philadelphia a stone-throwing mob marched on the home of Senator William Bingham. In Kentucky Senator Humphrey Marshall's constituents were so angry that the senator was "burned in effigy, vilified in print, and stoned in Frankfort." Other senators suffered similar attacks. Why were these senators so unpopular? On June 24, 1795, they had voted to approve a controversial treaty with Great Britain.⁶

A year earlier, President George Washington had sent Chief Justice John Jay to London to negotiate a new treaty with Great Britain in order to address grievances left over from the peace treaty of 1783. Jay demanded that Great Britain withdraw troops from the northwestern territories, compensate owners for enslaved people abducted during the Revolutionary War, stop the British impressment of American sailors, and allow free trade with the British West Indies. Despite difficult circumstances, Jay did obtain a commercial treaty, signed on November 19, 1794, but his agreement fell far

short of his goals. In particular, it failed to address two lingering causes of American anger towards



John Jay, by Gilbert Stuart, 1794. National Gallery of Art.

Great Britain—impressment of sailors and reimbursement for stolen slaves.⁷

When the Senate approved the less-than-perfect treaty in June of 1795 and the terms of the agreement became public, angry crowds took to the streets. Protesters condemned Jay and the Federalist senators who supported him for conceding too much during negotiations. To overcome this widespread hostility—some of which was provoked by the opposing political faction, the Democratic Republicans (also known as the Jeffersonian Republicans)—the Federalists had to find a way to turn the tide of public opinion. To do so, they launched a media blitz in the summer of 1795 that would shame today's social media masters. Utilizing every communication tool of the day—pamphlets, speeches, broadsides, petitions, essays—they set out to inform the public. “Steady wisdom always gets the better of this frantic enthusiasm,” commented one Federalist. “The more the treaty is read, the better it is understood, the less objectionable it appears.”⁸

Particularly influential in this campaign were articles written by Alexander Hamilton and published under the name Camillus. Widely distributed, the essays explained the details of the treaty, defended its constitutionality, and strongly rebutted the opposing arguments of the Democratic Republicans. In fact, Hamilton's essays proved to be so effective that a frustrated Thomas Jefferson turned to James Madison for help. “For god's sake take up your pen,” Jefferson pleaded to Madison, “give a fundamental reply to . . . Camillus.” Madison, perhaps wisely, chose to remain silent, while the exasperated Jefferson fumed at Monticello.⁹

By 1796 the Federalist campaign was succeeding. Public opinion did indeed shift, and once-angry Americans began voicing support for the treaty and the senators who approved it. When a group of

Democratic Republicans joined the Federalists in the House to approve funding for the treaty in April, the Federalist senators proclaimed victory. No longer would they be vilified in public—at least not until the next divisive issue came along.

Jay's Treaty, despite its limited success, had lasting consequences. It saved a still-fragile republic from a potentially disastrous new war with Britain and helped to assure American commercial independence. The debate over the treaty firmly established the nation's first political parties—the Federalists and the Democratic Republicans. Finally, the Federalist campaign to gain support for the treaty, and to exonerate the senators who approved it, provided an early example of the power of a well-organized media machine.¹⁰



“Burning Jay's Effigy,” ca. 1794. Courtesy of the Fenimore Art Museum Library, Cooperstown, NY, Coll. No. 444.

The Impeachment Trial of Judge John Pickering

Article I, section 3 of the Constitution states: “The Senate shall have the sole power to try all impeachments.” Since 1789 impeachment trials have been rare, but each trial has raised vexing questions, such as what constitutes an impeachable offense, or how to define “high crimes and misdemeanors”? To date, the House of Representatives has formally impeached 20 individuals: one senator, one Supreme Court justice, one cabinet secretary, three presidents, and 14 federal judges. Eight impeachment trials have resulted in conviction—all judges. The Senate’s first judicial impeachment trial occurred in 1804, when senators removed from office Judge John Pickering of New Hampshire. The charge against him? He was an “insane drunkard.”

John Pickering had enjoyed a long and respected career. A graduate of Harvard, he was a patriot of the Revolution who drafted New Hampshire’s state constitution. In 1795 President George Washington appointed him as district court judge. Unfortunately, in his later years, Pickering suffered from mental illness and alcoholism. By 1802, with the aged Pickering becoming increasingly unstable, some hoped he would resign, but no one actively sought that resignation. The Pickering family, noting the judge’s impoverished estate, which was made more desperate when the bulk of his property was lost to fire in 1802, hoped he could remain on the bench. Pickering’s Federalist supporters in local and state offices also did not seek his resignation, for reasons purely political. Had Pickering resigned after March of 1801, by which time the extent of his mental deterioration had become quite evident, his departure would have allowed the new Democratic Republican president,



Judge John Pickering. New Hampshire Historical Society.

Thomas Jefferson, to appoint a replacement, thereby taking a Federalist judge off the bench.¹¹

The extent of Pickering’s decline became undeniable in October of 1802 when the judge presided over a high-profile confiscation case, *United States v. the Brig, Eliza*. Pickering entered the courtroom intoxicated. He attacked bystanders, abused attorneys, and passed judgment before any witness was heard. While courtroom spectators erupted into laughter and jeers, the judge’s erratic behavior erased any remaining doubts of his advancing illness—and his lack of fitness for the bench.

Prompted by President Jefferson, the House impeached Pickering on March 3, 1803, with a vote of 45 to 8, then adopted official articles of impeachment later that year. As the Senate prepared for trial, it debated several troublesome issues, including the fact that the Constitution provided for no means of

removing federal judges other than by impeachment. No one denied that Pickering was unfit for office, but many questioned whether his conduct was impeachable. Could erratic behavior, senility, or chronic alcoholism be classified as “treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors”?¹²

The Senate trial began on March 2, 1804, with Vice President Aaron Burr presiding. Pickering did not appear, but attorney Robert Goodloe Harper read a statement describing the judge’s mental deterioration. House managers built their case around Pickering’s drunkenness, avoiding discussion of mental illness, but many senators expressed concern over the dilemma of trying an obviously insane man. The Senate solved that dilemma on March 12, 1804. For the first time in U.S. history, it convicted—and removed from office—a federal judge. Rather than

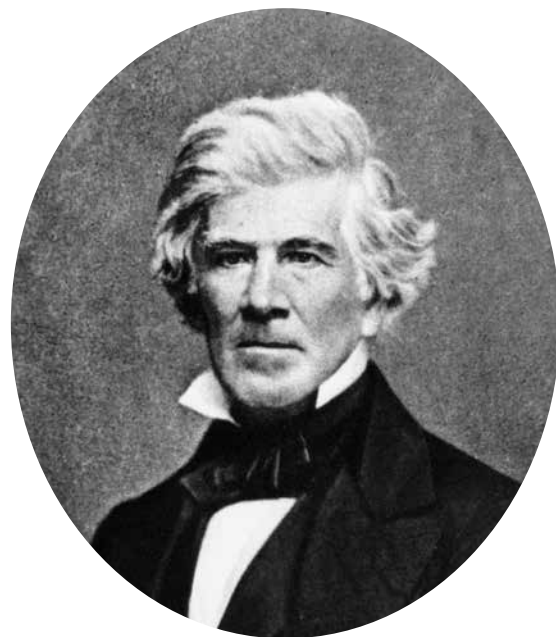
voting Pickering guilty of “high crimes and misdemeanors,” however, the Senate side-stepped the issue and voted him “guilty as charged.”¹³

This first judicial impeachment left many important questions unanswered—most notably, how to define “high crimes and misdemeanors.” Some scholars have criticized the Senate for not settling upon a concise definition, but noted constitutional scholar Joseph Story wrote in 1833 that such definitions must vary from case to case, insisting that “the whole subject must be left to the arbitrary discretion of the Senate.” Facing similar dilemmas through the years, senators have often echoed President Thomas Jefferson. At the end of the Pickering trial, Jefferson famously complained, “This business of removing Judges by impeachment is a bungling way.”¹⁴

Saving Senate Records

On a hot August day in 1814, as the United States battled Great Britain in the War of 1812, word reached the Capitol that British forces had pushed back the American army at Bladensburg, Maryland, and would soon occupy the city of Washington. In the late afternoon, British soldiers marched on the Capitol, torching just about everything in sight. The documentary record of the Senate’s earliest years might have gone up in flames as well, had it not been for the quick action taken by a 24-year-old Senate clerk named Lewis Machen.¹⁵

Samuel Otis, the Senate’s first secretary, had carefully organized and preserved the Senate’s growing collection of records, but Otis had died in April of 1814, and no secretary was on hand to protect the collection from the invading soldiers. Fortunately, with

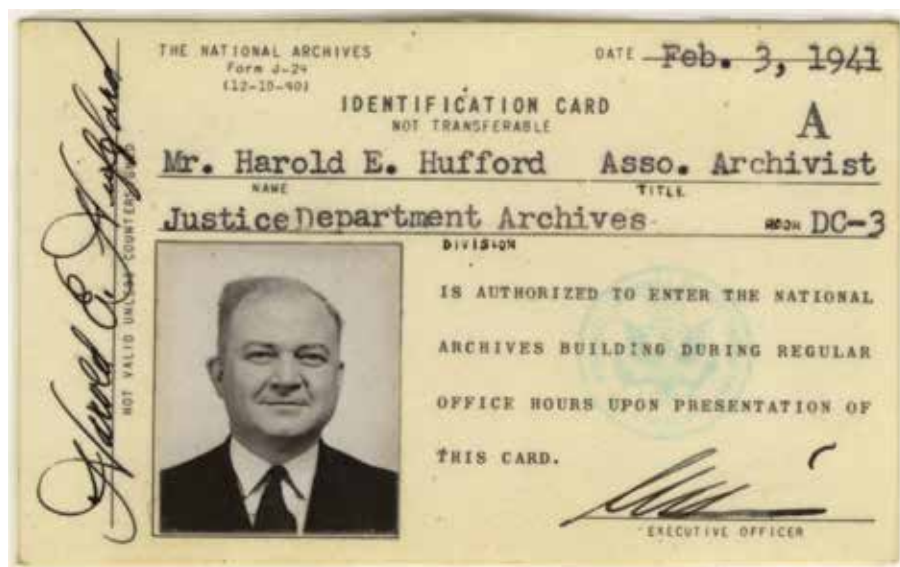


Senate clerk Lewis Machen. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

little time to spare, Machen devised a plan to save this precious archive. Assisted by a Senate messenger, an African American man named Tobias Simpson, Machen commandeered a wagon from a District resident and began loading it with bundles of Senate papers. “I engaged in removing . . . all the Books and papers of the office which I considered of more value,” he later recalled.

“When the sun was nearly setting, our vehicle being able to contain no more, I departed.”¹⁶

Machen headed toward a family farm in nearby Maryland. The journey proved to be adventurous. As he traveled in growing darkness, one wagon wheel flew off, forcing him to borrow “without leave from the owner” a replacement from an abandoned blacksmith shop. As he approached the Maryland state line, the wagon suddenly and violently overturned, spewing bundles of papers in all directions. It took several hours to repair that damage and reload the valuable cargo. In the early morning hours, Machen finally reached the relative safety of the farm. Later, another Senate clerk delivered the records to Brookville, Maryland, where government officials were working in exile. Five years later, the documents were returned to a rebuilt Capitol. As the years went by, these valuable records were tucked away in obscure Capitol spaces and mostly forgotten.



Harold Hufford's National Archives identification card. National Archives.

More than a century later, in 1927, another Senate clerk, Harold Hufford, entered a basement storeroom. On the floor under his foot lay an official-looking document that bore the print of his shoe and the signature of John C. Calhoun. “I knew who Calhoun was,” Hufford said, “and I knew the nation’s documents shouldn’t be treated like that.” Over the next decade, Hufford inventoried Senate records stored throughout the Capitol and discovered that autograph seekers had clipped away signatures and thieves had stolen notable state papers. Clearly, the Senate needed a place to archive its important collection.¹⁷

In 1934 Congress established the National Archives and Records Administration. Three years later, the Senate staged another important rescue mission and began transferring its records to the newly built Archives. Today, the Senate can boast of a vast archival collection dating back to March 4, 1789, its very first day of operation—thanks, in part, to two diligent clerks named Machen and Hufford.¹⁸

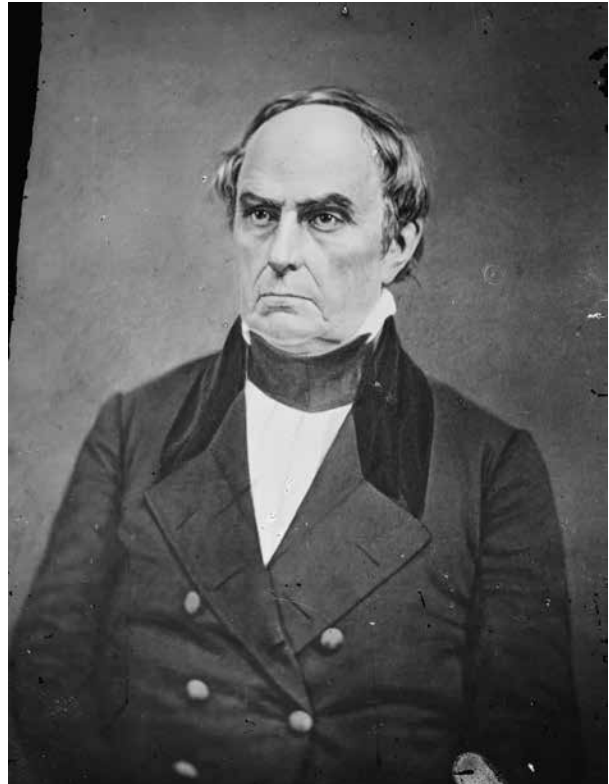
Webster's First Reply to Hayne

It has been called the Senate's most famous speech. "No scene in our history was endowed with finer drama," wrote one historian. Daniel Webster "stood foursquare . . . a robust . . . magnetic figure, tossing eloquent thunderbolts" at his opposition. Webster began his address on January 26, 1830, and concluded the following day with the ringing phrase, "Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable!" This electrifying speech is known rather mundanely as "Webster's Second Reply to Hayne." And that begs a question: What about Webster's *first* reply to Hayne?¹⁹

The debate had begun on December 29, 1829, with a resolution to limit the sale of public lands in the West. By mid-January of 1830, it had exploded into a combative argument over much more troubling issues. On January 18, Missouri senator Thomas Hart Benton, steadfast champion of the West, attacked the resolution as a diabolical plan to safeguard cheap labor in the North by shutting off western migration. Tying the land debate to the controversial issue of protective tariffs, Benton fanned the fires of sectional strife.

South Carolina senator Robert Hayne joined the fray a day later. A master debater and a protégé of southern leader John C. Calhoun, Hayne could deal out "killing blows" with "charming grace." He called for a complete end to public land sales by the federal government, insisting that the states alone had such authority. He warned against policies that threatened to consolidate northeastern states in alliance against the South or the West. Every state, he argued, had the power to nullify federal law.²⁰

At the time, Massachusetts senator Daniel Webster was busy arguing a case before the Supreme Court and had mostly ignored the debate. On this day, however, he strolled into the Senate Chamber just as



Senator Daniel Webster. Library of Congress.

Hayne was speaking. "I . . . believe that the very life of our system is the independence of the state," the South Carolinian declared. "There is no evil more to be deprecated than the consolidation of this government." This caught Webster's attention. Hayne was attacking the very nature of the Union. Webster took his seat. As Hayne concluded, northern senators called on Webster for an immediate reply, but night was falling, the Chamber was growing dark, and Webster decided to wait. The Senate adjourned.²¹

By the time the Senate convened on January 20, news of a potential battle of words had spread, and a huge crowd filled the galleries. Just after noon, Webster took the floor. His first reply to Hayne was "a point-blank speech," wrote a biographer, "deliberately

meant to be irritating.” Webster denounced Hayne’s doctrine of states’ rights and proclaimed his allegiance to a perpetual Union. “This is the true constitutional consolidation,” he argued. “I would strengthen the ties that hold us together. Far, indeed, in my wishes . . . be the day when our associated . . . stripes shall be severed asunder.” With fiery rhetoric, Webster condemned Hayne for his willingness to destroy the Union when it “suits local and temporary purposes.” In essence, Webster’s first reply was a charge of treason.²²

“The gentleman . . . discharged his fire in the face of the Senate,” Hayne rebuked when Webster concluded. He demanded “the opportunity of returning the shot.” Webster calmly replied, “Let the discussion proceed. I am now ready to receive the gentleman’s fire.” Thus, the stage was set for a second exchange, a debate that foreshadowed the turbulent decades ahead.²³



Senator Robert Hayne. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

Webster’s Second Reply to Hayne

South Carolina senator Robert Hayne, a rising star among southern members, delivered an alarming speech in the Senate Chamber on January 19, 1830, speaking against a consolidated union and promoting the principle of nullification. In response, Daniel Webster of Massachusetts issued a stern rebuke, pledging his undying fidelity to the Union. That exchange began one of the Senate’s greatest debates and produced several of its most famous speeches.

Following that first duel of words, Robert Hayne delivered a second address denying the validity of the Constitution. He bristled at Webster’s suggestion of treason and boldly attacked the Massachusetts senator. He reminded Webster that even he had once opposed the government, during the War of

1812, when New Englanders were among the war’s fiercest critics. Indeed, some of Webster’s more radical New England allies had called for secession. “If, sir, we are to have lessons of patriotism read to us,” Hayne declared, “they must come from a different quarter.” It was a brilliant speech. Many thought it unanswerable, but Daniel Webster rarely lacked an answer. “Give yourself no uneasiness,” Webster told a friend that evening. “I will grind him as fine as a pinch of snuff.”²⁴

It was said of Webster that no man on earth could be as great as he looked. “His raven hair . . . , his dark, sunken eyes glowing beneath his craggy brows . . . , the rich tones of his voice,” explained a historian, “all blended splendidly into a dramatic spectacle.” In his third year of Senate service in 1830, the 48-year-old



Webster's Reply to Hayne, by George P. A. Healy. Boston Art Commission.

senator was already a renowned speaker. He had demonstrated his oratorical skills in arguments before the Supreme Court, in House debates, and in mesmerizing four-hour after-dinner speeches. He could touch the emotions of an audience better than anyone, but he also presented well-reasoned arguments.²⁵

On January 26, 1830, Webster took the floor to deliver his Second Reply to Hayne. Eager spectators rustled into the galleries and spilled onto the Senate floor. Representatives lined the walls of the Senate Chamber. Former president John Quincy Adams sat among the dignitaries. Women in splendid regalia occupied Senate desks. Among the women present was Washington's society matron, Margaret Bayard Smith. "Almost everyone [thronged] to the capitol to hear Mr. Webster's reply," Smith explained. "Every seat, every inch of ground, even the steps, were compactly filled, and yet not space enough for the ladies—the Senators were obliged to relinquish their chairs."²⁶

Webster had before him some 12 pages of notes, but he rarely referred to them. His speech lasted several hours, stretched over two days, and kept his audience enthralled. Disunion? Nullification? Only chaos could result. He hoped he would never see the sun shine on the "broken and dishonored fragments of a once glorious Union," he proclaimed prophetically, "on a land rent with civil feuds, or drenched . . . in fraternal blood." Liberty first and Union afterwards, he asked? No! "Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable!"²⁷

It was "remarkable," John Quincy Adams wrote in his diary that evening. "It demolished the whole fabric" of Hayne's argument. In the weeks that followed, Webster carefully revised the speech into a formal statement that was destined to become an iconic endorsement of the Union. It remains—nearly two centuries later—the Senate's most famous speech.²⁸

Henry Clay's Last Compromise

On January 29, 1850, Henry Clay rose in the Old Senate Chamber to begin the most important debate of his career. A Whig from Kentucky, the “Great Compromiser” had first entered the Senate in 1806, served intermittently over four decades, and became a star of the Senate during the antebellum era. He resigned in 1842 to run for president—for the third time as his party’s chosen candidate—but returned in 1849 to seek a compromise solution to the nation’s growing sectional crisis. On this day, he hoped to forge one more legislative compromise in order to stave off civil war.

Showing the effects of age and tuberculosis, the 72-year-old statesman proposed eight resolutions to settle the dispute over territories acquired from the Mexican War. The key issue was whether states carved out of those territories would allow or prohibit slavery. Clay, who was an enslaver, proposed an “amicable arrangement of all questions in controversy between the free and slave States.” Adding drama to the occasion, Clay produced an unusual prop. He had recently called for the federal government to buy George Washington’s Mount Vernon estate. In gratitude, a supporter had presented Clay with a fragment of wood from Washington’s coffin. Was it portentous that this object had been presented to him, Clay asked? Was it a sign that the nation founded by Washington was dying? “No, sir, no,” thundered Clay, holding up the relic. “It was a warning voice, coming from the grave to the Congress . . . to beware, to pause, to reflect before they lend themselves to any purposes which shall destroy the Union.”²⁹

For six long months, Clay led the factious debate. Mississippi senator Henry Foote suggested combining the resolutions into a single bill, which Clay referred to as a “sort of omnibus” into which Foote introduced “all sorts of things and every kind of passenger.” The



Senator Henry Clay presents his compromise resolutions to the Senate. “The United States Senate. A.D. 1850,” Robert E. Whitechurch after Peter Frederick Rothermel, 1855. U.S. Senate Collection.

idea took hold, and Clay endorsed the Senate’s “omnibus bill.” He proclaimed it to be “neither southern nor northern. It is equal; it is fair; it is a compromise.”³⁰

On July 22, 1850, Clay delivered his last major speech in the Senate, calling for passage of the omnibus bill. If passed, the North would gain California as a free state and an end to the slave trade in Washington, D.C., while the South would get a stronger fugitive slave law and the possibility of slavery in western territories and states. This compromise, Clay insisted, represented the “reunion of [the] Union.”³¹

One week later, the Senate rejected Clay’s proposal. “The omnibus is overturned,” cried opponents. The omnibus strategy had failed. Rather than solidifying support, it unified opposition. Southerners protested any restriction on slavery, and northerners recoiled at the idea of returning fugitive slaves. A disheartened Henry Clay headed north to restore his failing health. In Clay’s absence, Stephen Douglas of Illinois took up the cause. He disassembled the omnibus and repackaged it into five separate bills, winning enactment of each major provision. In September, President Millard

Fillmore signed the Compromise of 1850 into law.³²

Clay's last compromise helped to avert civil war for another decade, but that victory came with a heavy cost—the continuation of slavery in America and an even stronger fugitive slave law. Clay's 1850 compromise was

hailed as a triumph by some, but to others, particularly enslaved Americans and the abolitionists who fought for their freedom, it was a bitter blow. Nevertheless, when the Old Kentuckian died in 1852, he went to his grave believing his compromise had saved the Union.³³

Recusants Save President Andrew Johnson

On a historic day in 1868, the Senate decided the fate of President Andrew Johnson. Voting on three of 11 articles of impeachment, 19 senators voted not guilty, and 35 senators voted guilty, falling short of the two-thirds majority needed to convict and remove the president from office. For most of those 54 senators, their vote was predictable. In the post-Civil War Senate, before most Southern states had been readmitted to representation, Republicans vastly outnumbered Democrats, and it was the Radical Republicans who vehemently opposed Johnson's policies. With such odds against him, how did the president survive?

Johnson's impeachment remains a complex story of sectional animosity, political battles, personality conflicts, and fundamental disagreements over post-war Reconstruction policy. It also involved an issue closely associated with the Senate—advice and consent. In 1867, as Johnson's relations with lawmakers deteriorated, Congress overrode his veto of the Tenure of Office Act. That law, a blatant effort by Congress to keep Abraham Lincoln's cabinet in power, required senatorial consent not only to confirm cabinet officials but also to remove them. Johnson defied Congress and fired Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, a Lincoln appointee and ally of the Radical Republicans. The House of Representatives retaliated by passing articles of impeachment, prompting the Senate's first-ever presidential impeachment trial.³⁴



"Mr. Geo. T. Brown, the Sergeant-at-Arms of the Senate, Serving on President Johnson, at His Office in the White House, Washington, D.C., the Summons to Appear before the High Court of Impeachment," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, March 28, 1868. U.S. Senate Collection.

The Senate trial began with preliminaries on March 5, 1868, with Chief Justice Salmon Chase presiding. Beginning on March 30, the House managers, serving as prosecutors, presented their case. The president's defense lawyers took center stage on April 15. As the spectacle of the trial played out, visitors competed for seats in the Chamber galleries, and bookmakers calculated the odds as gamblers bet on the president's fate. Rallies were held both to support and oppose Johnson. Newspaper editors urged citizens to write their senators, and state legislatures adopted resolutions for or against conviction.³⁵

On May 16, after two months of spectacular trial proceedings, Johnson's enemies in the Senate



"The Senate as a Court of Impeachment for the Trial of Andrew Johnson," *Harper's Weekly*, April 11, 1868. U.S. Senate Collection.

maneuvered a vote on three of the 11 impeachment articles, the three considered as most likely to gain votes for conviction. "Mr. Anthony," the clerk queried Rhode Island's Henry Anthony, "is the respondent, Andrew Johnson . . . , guilty or not guilty of a high misdemeanor?" "Guilty," answered the senator, and the roll call continued. The final tally stood at 35 votes for guilty and 19 votes for not guilty, just one vote short of the necessary two-thirds majority to convict. Ten days later, the Senate voted on two more articles with the same result.³⁶

Notable among the 19 senators who voted to acquit the president were the so-called recusants, seven Republican senators who broke with their party. William Fessenden of Maine, James Grimes of Iowa, and Lyman Trumbull of Illinois voiced their intentions early on. "I cannot agree to destroy the harmonious working of the Constitution," stated Grimes, "for the sake of getting rid of an Unacceptable

President." Some said they preferred Johnson to Benjamin Wade, the Senate's president pro tempore, who at that time, with no vice president in office, was next in line to the presidency.³⁷

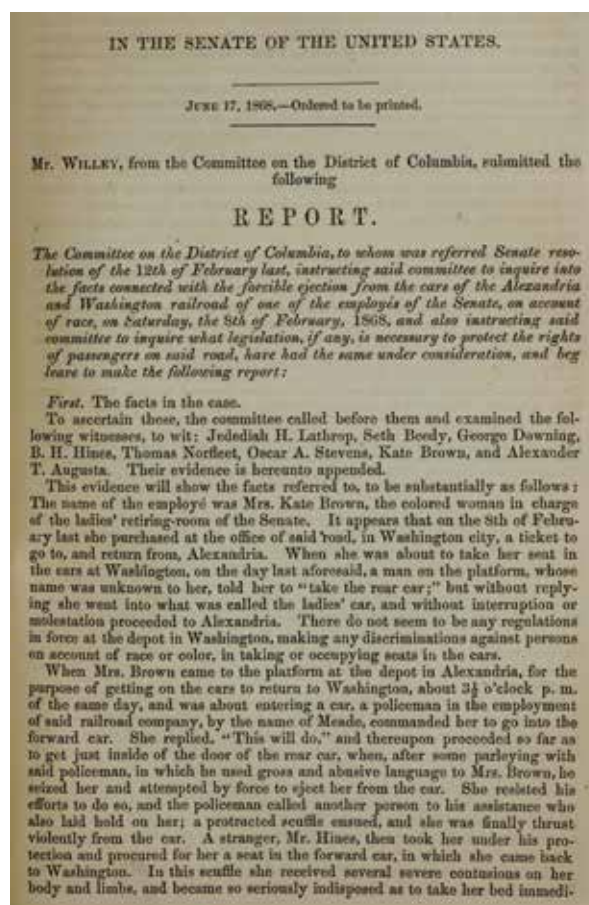
The motivation of others remains murky. Peter Van Winkle of West Virginia, John Henderson of Missouri, Joseph Fowler of Tennessee, and Edmund Ross of Kansas all voted to acquit. Evidence is not conclusive, but it is likely that at least one—Edmund Ross—and perhaps more accepted a bribe in return for a vote of not guilty. Johnson and his allies did their best to make deals in order to avoid conviction. For years the recusants were hailed as heroes—Edmund Ross was even included in John F. Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage*—but modern scholarship has cast them in darker tones. Were they heroes or were they villains? Statesmen or scoundrels? We may never know for sure. Regardless of motivation, however, their votes kept President Andrew Johnson in office.³⁸

The Kate Brown Story

As a Senate employee “in charge of the ladies’ retiring room,” Kate Brown worked hard. Senators noticed her “lady-like character” and described her as “intelligent” and “refined.” She was not a rebel or a troublemaker, but on this winter day Kate Brown rebelled. On February 8, 1868, Brown pulled out her ticket and prepared to board a train to return to Washington, D.C., from Alexandria, Virginia. As she stepped aboard, she was accosted by the rail line’s private police officer, who angrily told her she must enter the other car. “This car will do,” Brown replied quietly. At that point, as she later told a Senate investigating committee, “the policeman ran up and told me I could not ride in that car. . . . He said that car was for ladies.” Of course, Kate Brown was a lady, but she was also African American.

Not deterred, Brown responded: “I bought my ticket to go to Washington in this car . . . , before I leave this car I will suffer death.” A violent altercation ensued. Reportedly, Brown was physically ejected from the train and dragged along the platform. Fortunately, another Senate employee, a committee clerk named B. H. Hinds, arrived on the scene. He accompanied the badly injured Brown back to Washington, where she sought medical treatment.³⁹

Upon hearing of the incident, Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner demanded that the Senate investigate this “outrage that has occurred within sight of [the] Capitol.” Senator Charles Drake of Missouri agreed. “It is an outrage upon an American woman,” he cried, “a citizen of the United States.” On February 10, Lot Morrill of Maine introduced a resolution to investigate. Later that month, Iowa senator James Harlan heard testimony from officials of the railroad company, from eyewitnesses, and from Brown’s doctor. Too badly



Report from the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia on the Kate Brown incident, June 17, 1868. S. Rept. 40-131; Serial Set 1320. U.S. Senate Library.

injured to appear, Kate Brown gave her testimony from her sick bed.⁴⁰

Harlan’s committee issued a report favorable to Brown, then deferred the matter to the courts. Kate Brown sued the railroad company. Legal arguments focused on the company’s right to segregate its cars. At the time, segregation was common on many railroads, but in this particular case it was illegal. The 1863 congressional charter authorizing the Washington & Alexandria Railway included—at the insistence of Charles Sumner—this key sentence: “That no person shall be excluded from the cars on account of color.”

Railroad officials argued that they complied with the charter by providing two separate but identical cars.⁴¹

The Supreme Court for the District of Columbia disagreed and awarded \$1,500 to Kate Brown. The railroad company appealed. On November 17, 1873, in an opinion delivered by Justice David Davis, the United States Supreme Court confirmed that the 1863 charter remained in force. It upheld the lower court decision and rejected the company's "separate but

equal" argument as "an ingenious attempt to evade compliance with the obvious meaning" of the charter.⁴²

Kate Brown won. She remained a Senate employee until 1881. Except for the occasional footnote to *Railroad Company v. Brown* in legal texts, her story is mostly forgotten, but this act of rebellion by a Senate employee brought before the Supreme Court its first case concerning the contentious issue of racial segregation in public transportation.⁴³

Charles Sumner Crusades for a Civil Rights Act

Visitors to the U.S. Capitol often hear of the dramatic events leading to that famous moment in 1856 when Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner was attacked by a proslavery representative from South Carolina. Too often, the story ends with the badly beaten Sumner lying unconscious on the Chamber floor. This notorious event is certainly a tragic moment in Senate history, but it is just one milestone in the career of Charles Sumner.

On May 22, 1856, two days after Sumner concluded his inflammatory speech entitled "The Crime Against Kansas," South Carolina representative Preston Brooks retaliated by brutally beating Sumner as he sat at his desk in the Senate Chamber. In the weeks that followed, Congress launched investigations into the "Brooks-Sumner Affair," and Sumner began a long and painful recovery. Fortunately, after three years of recuperation, during which he made only occasional appearances in the Senate, Sumner did resume his Senate duties. He returned in 1859 and served another 15 years, becoming an influential and trailblazing legislator.⁴⁴



Senator Charles Sumner. Library of Congress.

In 1870, with abolition secured and the focus shifted to civil rights for African Americans, Sumner introduced what he considered to be his most important piece of legislation, a bill to guarantee to all citizens, regardless of color, “equal and impartial enjoyment of any accommodation, advantage, facility, or privilege.” As proposed, the bill sought “to secure equal rights in railroads, steamboats, public conveyances, hotels, theaters, houses of public entertainment, common schools, and institutes of learning authorized by law, church institutions, and cemetery associations incorporated by national or State authority, also on juries in courts.” Having characterized segregation and other discriminatory laws as “nothing but the tail of slavery,” Sumner predicted that his civil rights bill would be the greatest achievement of Reconstruction. In a pattern that became repetitive, the Senate referred the bill to the Judiciary Committee, where it died.⁴⁵

At the time, Illinois senator Lyman Trumbull chaired the Judiciary Committee. Trumbull and Sumner often agreed on principle, but they rarely

agreed on method. Throughout the final months of the Civil War, for example, they had fought over who would control the Senate’s consideration of the Thirteenth Amendment. That antagonism continued into the post-war period and influenced the course of Sumner’s civil rights bill.

Never shy of a fight, Sumner again introduced his bill in 1871. “There must be equal rights in cars, in steamboats, in hotels, in schools, everywhere, in every institution or in every place that has had the sanction of existing law,” he insisted. Again, the Senate referred the bill to the Judiciary Committee, and again Trumbull and his allies killed it. Some argued the bill was an unconstitutional exercise of government authority, while others stated it was made unnecessary by ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment. Many worried that Sumner’s true goal was social equality between White and Black Americans, a goal they were unwilling to support.

Sumner persevered, year after year, only to see his efforts blocked. In 1874, even as his health failed, the crusader remained steadfast in his support of civil

rights. “Don’t let the bill fail,” the dying Sumner pleaded to Frederick Douglass and others at his bedside. “You must take care of [my] civil-rights bill.” Sumner died on March 11, 1874. Without his leadership, the bill barely survived. A weakened version of it did become law in 1875, only to be declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1883. It took another eight decades for Sumner’s ideas to finally gain legislative endorsement—with the Civil Rights Act of 1964.⁴⁶



“The Death of Charles Sumner,” Currier & Ives print, 1874. Library of Congress.

Alcorn's Great Insult

On March 5, 1875, a hushed anticipation filled the Senate Chamber as Blanche Bruce of Mississippi, the second African American to serve in the Senate and the first to serve a full term, rose from his desk to take the oath of office. He stood alone. It is customary for a state's senior senator to escort a new colleague to the presiding officer's desk to take the oath, but Mississippi's senior senator, James Alcorn, refused. Instead, he sat resolutely at his desk, his face buried in a newspaper.

After a moment of embarrassed hesitation, Bruce began his solitary walk down the aisle. As he reached the halfway mark, New York senator Roscoe Conkling

appeared. "If I may, Mr. Bruce," Conkling said, "permit me. I am the senator from New York, Roscoe Conkling." Linking his arm through that of the grateful Bruce, Conkling accompanied him to the presiding officer's desk and stood by as the new senator took the oath of office. Conkling saved the moment, Bruce's historic Senate career began, and James Alcorn's refusal to serve as escort became a part of Senate lore—one of the Great Insults of Senate History. But what motivated that insult? We may assume that we know the answer to that question—but there is more to this story.⁴⁷

James Alcorn was born in Illinois in 1816 but spent much of his childhood and young adulthood in Kentucky before settling in the Mississippi Delta region. Trained in the law, but a planter and enslaver by occupation, he served as a Whig in the Mississippi legislature, where he strongly opposed calls for secession, fearing such a move would endanger the welfare of planters and their property. He helped organize the state's Union Party and supported its presidential candidate, John Bell, in 1860. In 1861 Alcorn attended the state secession convention as a Union delegate, but when the convention voted to secede, he followed, becoming a brigadier general in the Confederate army.⁴⁸

During post-war Reconstruction, Alcorn supported voting rights for freedmen and endorsed the Fourteenth Amendment. "I propose to vote with [the Black man]," he declared in 1867, "to discuss political affairs with him, to sit . . . in political counsel with him, and from a platform acceptable [to all citizens] to pluck our common liberty and our common prosperity [out of the ruins of war]." His support for freedmen's rights had its limitations, however, and he continued to support racial segregation throughout the post-war era. In 1869 Alcorn was elected governor with the support of many of Mississippi's newly enfranchised Black



Senator Blanche Bruce. Library of Congress.



Senator James Alcorn. Library of Congress.

voters—including Blanche Bruce, who was appointed to his first political office by Governor James Alcorn.⁴⁹

In 1871 the Mississippi state legislature sent Alcorn to the Senate to join Adelbert Ames, who had become a senator the previous year. Although both were Republicans, Alcorn was a so-called Regular Republican, a moderate, while Ames was a Radical Republican. The two men immediately clashed on a number of issues,

particularly the combustible issue of federal intervention in state elections. They came to represent a growing division in the southern Republican Party, a division that would ultimately undermine its strength and allow for a Democratic resurgence by the mid-1870s.

The feud between the two senators peaked in 1873, when they opposed each other in that year's gubernatorial election. The dominant Radical Republicans, including a majority of African Americans, nominated Ames. In response, Alcorn bolted the party and challenged him as an independent candidate, further splitting the party into factions. Adelbert Ames won the election, and he did it with the support of a young Black politician named Blanche Bruce—the same man whose political career had been launched by James Alcorn. And therein lay the primary motive for the Great Insult, when an embittered James Alcorn resolutely refused to leave his seat on March 5, 1875, to stand by the newly elected Bruce as he took his oath of office.⁵⁰

As Alcorn completed his single term in the Senate, his alienation from the Republican Party became more pronounced, and his sympathies fell more in line with other disgruntled planters who hoped to reestablish their pre-war supremacy, by violence if necessary. In retirement, despite his early support for Bruce and other African American politicians, Alcorn remained a segregationist and helped to establish Jim Crow laws that remained in force for decades.⁵¹

The Impeachment Trial of William Belknap

In the 1870s, an era that Mark Twain dubbed the Gilded Age, Secretary of War William Belknap gained fame for his extravagant parties, luxurious homes, and elegantly attired wives. In fact, many questioned how Belknap's \$8,000 government

salary could support such an opulent lifestyle. Journalist Benjamin Perley Poore once suggested that the Belknaps must be “obliged to retire from society and inhabit a cheap boarding-house” or find some way to “replenish the family coffers.”⁵²

Just how those coffers were replenished became known in 1876, when a committee of the House of Representatives uncovered a pattern of corruption in Belknap's activities that was blatant even by the standards of this scandal-tarnished era of American history. In an early rendition of "follow the money," the committee discovered a complex bribery scheme dating back to 1870. Belknap's luxury-loving second wife, Carrie, had assisted a wheeler-dealer named Caleb Marsh in gaining operation of a lucrative military trading post. Marsh's promise of generous kickbacks convinced Secretary Belknap to make the appointment. When Carrie Belknap died in December of 1870, her sister, Amanda, insisted that the bribery scheme continue. Three years later, Amanda became the third Mrs. Belknap. By 1876 Marsh had provided the Belknaps with regular payments totaling nearly \$25,000.

On March 2, 1876, just minutes before the House planned to vote on articles of impeachment, Belknap raced to the White House and demanded to see President Ulysses S. Grant. When Grant arrived, Belknap burst into tears, then rambled on about illegal gifts, demanding wives, unfortunate schemes, and protecting the family honor. "I came to tender you my resignation," he sobbed. "Accept it at once . . . For God's sake, do not hesitate." President Grant—perhaps believing his war secretary to be the victim of unscrupulous spouses and no doubt wishing to distance himself from a scandal—agreed. Belknap resigned.⁵³

Later that day, despite the resignation, the House of Representatives voted unanimously to approve five articles of impeachment, charging Belknap with "basely prostituting his high office to his lust for private gain." The impeachment trial began on April 5 with Belknap's lawyers arguing that the Senate had no jurisdiction over the now-retired cabinet official. House managers insisted that Belknap should not be allowed to escape justice simply by resigning. The Senate voted to proceed. As the trial continued, newspapers

reported sensational stories of bribery, perjury, and coded messages. Then, on August 1, 1876, the Senate rendered a majority vote against Belknap on all five articles of impeachment but failed to gain the necessary two-thirds vote to convict. There was little doubt about Belknap's guilt—only one senator voiced support for the impeached official—but lingering questions over jurisdiction saved him from conviction.

The Belknap impeachment, despite its sordid details, remains an important milestone in Senate history. This was the first, and to date only, impeachment trial of a cabinet official. This was the first impeachment to be truly bipartisan. Finally, the failure to convict Belknap in the wake of his resignation convinced the Senate that it made little sense to pursue impeachment, trial, and conviction of an official who was already out of office.⁵⁴



"Washington, D.C.—Interview, at the White House, between President Grant and Secretary Belknap," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, March 18, 1876. U.S. Senate Collection.

William Alden Smith Investigates the Titanic Disaster

On Sunday, April 14, 1912, at 11:40 p.m., the world's largest and most luxurious ocean liner struck an iceberg. Two hours and 40 minutes later, the RMS *Titanic* sank, claiming the lives of more than 1,500 passengers and crew—nearly 70 percent of those on board. News of the event shocked everyone. How could such a disaster happen in the modern era of “unsinkable” ships? Senator William Alden Smith of Michigan sought an answer to that question.

On April 17, within 72 hours of the event, Smith proposed a special investigation by the Senate Commerce Committee. He needed to act quickly. The rescue ship *Carpathia* would soon dock in New York City carrying more than 700 survivors, including Bruce Ismay, managing director of the White Star Line. Smith feared the British shipping company would quickly transport all surviving officers and crew out of U.S. jurisdiction, preventing them from giving vital eyewitness testimony. Just as the



Hearing of the Senate Committee on Commerce subcommittee investigating the Titanic disaster, 1912. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

Carpathia docked, therefore, Smith arrived in New York with a deputy sergeant at arms and a stack of subpoenas.⁵⁵

The *Titanic* hearings began on Friday, April 19, at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. Two days later, Smith and his team returned to Washington to continue hearings on Capitol Hill. Public interest was so intense that hundreds of people crowded into the ornate caucus room of the Senate Office Building, hoping for a glimpse of the survivors. When police blocked the doors, curious spectators clambered onto the balcony and peered in through the large windows. The next day, to avoid further spectacle, Smith moved the hearings to a smaller, closed committee room.⁵⁶

A total of 82 witnesses testified over 18 days, providing chilling details of those fateful final hours aboard the *Titanic*. The committee learned of inadequate safety procedures, an ill-equipped crew, and unheeded travel warnings. Passenger Helen Bishop recalled how a ship's steward dismissed her concerns. "Go back downstairs," he told her. "We have only struck a little piece of ice." The ship's lookout man testified that he could have spotted the iceberg on that clear night if only he had been supplied with binoculars. At least four warnings of icebergs had reached the ship's captain, and yet, the committee learned, when disaster struck, the *Titanic* was traveling near maximum speed.⁵⁷

Smith issued the committee report on May 28, 1912. Even today, more than a century later, the report reads like a thriller full of heroes, villains, and missed opportunities. There was the captain who ignored every warning. Another captain, aboard a nearby ship, had gone into radio silence and failed to hear the call for help. Forever disgraced, Bruce Ismay



Senator William Alden Smith. Library of Congress.

fled to safety while so many others died. And there were heroes, like the musicians who never stopped playing, the radiomen who refused to abandon their post, and the captain of the rescue ship *Carpathia*, called a "marvel" of efficiency and compassion.⁵⁸

The tragedy of the *Titanic* has become well known, but ignored is the work of Senator William Alden Smith. In those crucial days after the disaster, Smith acted quickly to capture firsthand testimony from key witnesses, satisfying the public's need to know and prompting improved safety measures. Even more important, this investigation created an extensive documentary record that has provided the foundation for every subsequent account, factual or fictional, of the sinking of the supposedly unsinkable RMS *Titanic*.

The Senate and the Suffragists

On June 4, 1919, the Senate approved the Woman Suffrage Amendment, clearing the way for state ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. That achievement did not come easily. During the 41 years from proposal to passage, suffragists marched, protested, lobbied, and sacrificed to gain the Senate's approval, while their supporters in the Senate promoted their cause.

California senator Aaron Sargent was among the Senate's earliest woman suffrage supporters, due in large part to the activism of his wife, Ellen, who founded one of the first woman suffrage organizations in California. She became a vocal proponent for female suffrage in Washington, D.C. When the couple had an unexpected meeting with

suffrage leader Susan B. Anthony, the three became fellow crusaders.

On January 10, 1878, Sargent became the first senator to formally introduce a resolution for a woman suffrage amendment. It stated: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." Sargent also requested that the Senate allow suffragists to speak on Capitol Hill. Before long, Susan B. Anthony and other activists were testifying before congressional committees. The Constitution provides for a government "of the people," Anthony declared to one committee. "Does anyone pretend to say that men alone constitute [the people]?" Senators listened politely, but most of them remained



Supporters of women's suffrage leave a rally at Hyattsville, MD, to go to the Capitol, July 31, 1913. Library of Congress.

unconvinced. Sargent's proposed amendment was "indefinitely postponed."⁵⁹

In 1882 Massachusetts senator George Hoar took up the cause and successfully advocated for the creation of a Senate Committee on Woman Suffrage. On June 5, 1882, that committee favorably reported the constitutional amendment to the full Senate. "We conclude . . . [that] every reason . . . which bestows the ballot upon man is equally applicable to the proposition to bestow the ballot upon woman," the committee proclaimed, but the Senate chose not to vote on the measure.⁶⁰

As months and then years passed, suffragists became increasingly frustrated. By the 1890s, they had established woman suffrage organizations across the nation, and, slowly, states began to provide suffrage rights to women. Despite this success at the state level, however, the amendment for national suffrage remained stalled. To gain congressional approval, suffragists would have to take drastic action. And so, in 1913, they launched the "Siege of the Senate." On July 31 of that year, crowds of activists arrived in Washington, D.C., in a parade of automobiles, carrying petitions signed by thousands of women and men. "We want action now," chanted the suffragists as they marched into the Capitol. Opponents called the siege a cheap advertising trick, but as the women filled the Senate's halls and committee rooms, armed with banners, picket signs, and lengthy petitions, senators had no choice but to pay attention.

Senators who supported suffrage rights quickly introduced petitions on behalf of women in their home states. Giving women the vote, suggested Reed Smoot of Utah, "has made no daughter less beautiful, no wife less devoted, no mother less inspiring." Even senators opposed to female suffrage felt pressure from the lady lobbyists and offered petitions. "I wish to say that I am opposed to the passage of the amendment," explained John Thornton of Louisiana, before

he obediently submitted a petition. "Whatever may be my personal view on this matter," confessed New Jersey's James Martine, "I would be a veritable coward [should] I not present this petition." Senator Robert Owen of Oklahoma, a member of the Committee on Woman Suffrage, implored his colleagues to consider the suffrage issue "with [an] unbiased mind, free from prejudice or passion." That proved to be a difficult task for many senators. Opposition to the suffrage campaign came not only from those who wished to deny all women the vote, but also from those who wished to deny the vote only to African American women. The "suffrage cause draws upon itself the burden of the race question," Idaho senator William Borah explained, and another senator suggested that a Nineteenth Amendment could be approved only if Congress first repealed the Fifteenth Amendment.⁶¹

On March 19, 1914, the Senate finally voted on the Woman Suffrage Amendment. As women watched from the galleries, the amendment went down to defeat, 11 votes short of the required two-thirds majority. Failure! But now senators were "on record" on the issue of suffrage for women, and over the next five years the suffragists would use that knowledge to their advantage. To turn defeat into victory, the suffragists ramped up pressure on those wayward senators, determined either to sway their vote or see them defeated at the polls.⁶²

As the battle continued into the fall of 1918, Alice Paul, leader of the National Woman's Party, calculated that they were still two votes short of the two-thirds majority required to approve the amendment. One of those votes belonged to William Borah. First elected by the Idaho state legislature in 1907, Borah was now facing reelection by popular vote for the first time, and that made him vulnerable. Borah supported female suffrage—women in Idaho had enjoyed the right to vote since 1896—but he opposed a constitutional amendment, insisting the matter

should be left to the states. He wrote to a constituent that he was aware that his position would “lead to much criticism among friends at home,” but he argued, “I would rather give up the office [than to] cast a vote . . . I do not believe in.”⁶³

Determined to influence Borah’s vote, Alice Paul convinced the Idaho Republican Party to adopt a plank supporting a national suffrage amendment. Women in the state flooded Borah’s office with letters demanding his support—or face defeat at the polls. Before long, Borah’s comfortable lead over his opponent all but disappeared. With election drawing near, a now desperate Borah agreed to meet with Paul. No record of that meeting survives, but when it concluded, Paul wired a statement to Idaho suffragists. She had talked with Borah, she assured them, and if

reelected, he pledged to vote for the suffrage amendment. With that promise in hand, Paul instructed suffragists in Idaho to stand down.⁶⁴

On November 5, 1918, thanks in part to his pledge to the suffragists, Borah won his bid for a third term. Suffragists also picked up a second vote when supporter William Pollock of South Carolina won a special election and immediately took office. Confident they had the support they needed, suffragists encouraged the Senate to schedule a vote. On February 10, 1919, during a lame-duck session, the Senate again voted on the Woman Suffrage Amendment. Its fate soon became clear. Coming early in the roll call of senators, William Borah voted no. He had betrayed the suffragists and broken his pledge. The amendment failed by a single vote.⁶⁵



Vice President Thomas Marshall signs the Woman Suffrage Amendment, June 4, 1919. Library of Congress.

Into the darkest hour comes light. That fateful midterm election of 1918 had returned Borah to office to stage his betrayal, but it had also brought in a large class of freshman senators, a majority of whom had supported suffrage in their own campaigns. As the new Congress convened on March 4, 1919, suffragists could truly be confident that victory was at hand. The House passed the amendment

on May 21, and all eyes again turned to the Senate. On June 4, 1919, a coalition of 36 Republicans and 20 Democrats joined forces to reach the necessary two-thirds majority of those present and voting to pass the bill. Minutes later, Vice President Thomas Marshall, with several suffragists standing by as witnesses, signed the bill. The Senate had *finally* passed the Woman Suffrage Amendment.⁶⁶

Election Sets Stage for Treaty Defeat

The congressional election of 1918 proved to be one of the most consequential in the nation's history. At the time, President Woodrow Wilson was in his second term, and Democrats enjoyed a strong majority in the Senate. That seemed likely to continue until some surprising election results shifted the balance of power and set the stage for an important Senate debate.

In 1918 the nation was preoccupied with the waning days of the First World War. During the war, congressional Republicans had opposed Wilson over domestic issues, but they downplayed partisan disputes over foreign policy. Republican senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts privately warned his colleagues to suspend the "attacks on Wilson" to avoid "the cry that we are not loyal to the war." Likewise, President Wilson declared that "politics is adjourned" during the war emergency. As the 1918 congressional elections approached, however, Wilson abandoned nonpartisanship to actively promote candidates who agreed to support his post-war plans.⁶⁷

October 25, 1918, became a turning point in Wilson's presidency. With the election just 10 days away, the president issued a bold statement demanding

that voters reject Republican candidates and return his Democratic majority. Proclaiming that the "difficulties . . . of our present task" required a unified leadership, he added that a "Republican Congress would divide the leadership." Wilson's statement transformed a run-of-the-mill campaign into a heated contest.⁶⁸

On Election Day, Republicans swept the congressional elections, taking a commanding lead in the House of Representatives and gaining a crucial two-seat majority in the Senate. The president's party often suffers a loss in midterm elections, but the imperious tone of Wilson's October plea certainly helped to turn the political tide. For Wilson, the worst result of the election was that it placed his political nemesis, Henry Cabot Lodge, into two powerful positions: majority leader and chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.⁶⁹

Wilson's vision for the post-war world called for maintaining peace through a system of collective security enforced by a League of Nations. The Treaty of Versailles became Wilson's means to achieve that vision. Lodge was not necessarily opposed to a League of Nations, but he disliked Wilson's plan. He preferred to separate peacemaking



Cartoon depicting Henry Cabot Lodge and the Treaty of Versailles. "The Lamb from the Slaughter," by Clifford Berryman, September 5, 1919. Library of Congress.

from the creation of a league, but Wilson insisted that the two were inseparable. Thus, while Wilson negotiated the treaty in Paris, without consultation with senators, Lodge sought a way to gain Senate approval of a treaty on his own terms.⁷⁰

The crucial debate occurred in 1919. In the Senate, Lodge led a divided caucus. One group, the Republican "irreconcilables," led by isolationist William Borah of Idaho, opposed the treaty in any

form. The Republican "reservationists," including Lodge, supported the treaty only if corrected by Senate reservations. Democrats, for the most part, endorsed Wilson's plan. The potential for treaty approval certainly existed, if Wilson and Lodge could reach a compromise.

Fearing the treaty delegated to the League too much power over U.S. action, particularly military action, Lodge crafted a set of reservations to protect

American interests. In March of 1919, he announced that he had the votes to approve a treaty if it included such reservations, but Wilson adamantly refused to accept any changes, and the debate continued. In November, after months of impasse, Lodge sent the treaty to the Senate floor—with 14 reservations. The angry president responded. Wilson urged Senate Democrats to reject any treaty put forth by Lodge. Thus, on November 19, 1919, a group of Democratic

senators—at Wilson’s request—joined the irreconcilables and defeated the treaty. A second vote four months later produced the same result.⁷¹

Wilson’s intrusion into the 1918 election, and his refusal to work with the Republican majority it produced, ultimately cost him what he hoped would be his greatest achievement. The United States never ratified the Treaty of Versailles, and it never joined the League of Nations.

Rebecca Felton Becomes the First Woman Senator

Governor Thomas Hardwick of Georgia had to act quickly. On September 26, 1922, Senator Thomas Watson had died in office, leaving a vacancy to be filled by gubernatorial appointment until a special election on November 7. Hardwick, who had just lost his bid for reelection as governor, hoped to win that special election himself and continue his political career in the Senate. Needing to appoint a “place-holder” to serve until November, Hardwick settled on what he hoped would be a winning campaign strategy. Prior to the recent ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, Hardwick had vehemently opposed giving women the vote, alienating a large portion of Georgia’s female population. If he appointed a woman to fill the Senate vacancy—who would become the first woman to serve in the Senate—Hardwick might overcome that opposition. His choice? Rebecca Felton—87-year-old “Mother Felton.”⁷²

Rebecca Felton’s “Grandma Moses” appearance was deceptive. Long active in Georgia politics, Felton became associated with two vitally important



Senator Rebecca Felton. Library of Congress.

issues of the early 20th century. She helped advance the cause of women’s rights as an outspoken advocate for woman suffrage, but she also opposed

civil rights for African Americans and repeatedly refused to support anti-lynching laws. She first came to Washington in 1875 as the outspoken wife of Representative William Felton, alarming his more conventional constituents by upstaging her husband and delivering fiery stump speeches. For 30 years she wrote a regular column for the *Atlanta Journal*. By 1922 she was known as the “grand old lady” of Georgia politics.⁷³

On October 3, 1922, Governor Hardwick made history by appointing Felton as the first female senator. Since the Senate had adjourned sine die, Hardwick’s action was a purely symbolic attempt to gain female

votes. Before the new congressional session began in December, Felton would have to step aside for her elected replacement. The *Pittsburgh Gazette-Times* accurately described the appointment as “merely a pretty sentiment” and an “empty gesture.” Hardwick stated publicly that he’d like to see “the old lady” go to Washington, but he doubted that she would ever appear on the Senate floor.⁷⁴

Hardwick’s scheme backfired. He lost the November 7 election to Walter George, and across the nation a movement arose to seat Felton in the Senate. Scores of women descended upon Washington, and even more sent letters and telegrams



Suffragists cheer Senator Rebecca Felton at the Capitol. Library of Congress.

demanding that President Warren G. Harding convene a special session of Congress to swear in the “lady from Georgia.” Harding resisted—for a while. Then on November 9, he announced his call for a special session, declaring it necessary to deal with a ship subsidy bill. When the Senate convened on November 21, the politically astute Walter George delayed presenting his credentials so that Felton could officially claim the honor of becoming the first woman senator. She took the oath of office shortly after noon, then served for 24 hours before relinquishing the seat to George.⁷⁵

Before leaving office, Felton answered one roll-call vote and delivered a single speech. “When the women of the country come in and sit with you,” she told her colleagues, “you will get ability, you will get integrity . . . , you will get exalted patriotism, and you will get unstinted usefulness.” A gallery full of women erupted into cheers and applause as Senator Felton bade farewell. “The one message I have for women,” she said, “is that their era has dawned.” What began as one man’s ploy to gain a Senate seat ended as a milestone for women in American politics.⁷⁶

Thomas Walsh Investigates Teapot Dome

How did Albert Fall get so rich so fast? That was the question being asked in the early 1920s as the Senate conducted one of its most high-profile investigations. Today, the words “Teapot Dome” are nearly synonymous with “political corruption,” but the details of this infamous political scandal are not well known. In particular, few remember the key investigative role played by a Montana senator named Thomas Walsh.⁷⁷

Just north of Casper, Wyoming, sat a natural stone formation roughly resembling a teapot, and below it lay a rich, dome-shaped reserve of oil. Known as Teapot Dome, this oil reserve was part of the vast federal land holdings in the West. In 1915 President Woodrow Wilson assigned control of Teapot Dome, along with two reserves in California, to the Navy Department—the plan being to keep the oil in reserve to fuel American warships.⁷⁸

At the end of the First World War, however, the reserves remained untapped, so Congress passed the Leasing Act of 1920 to allow leasing of the



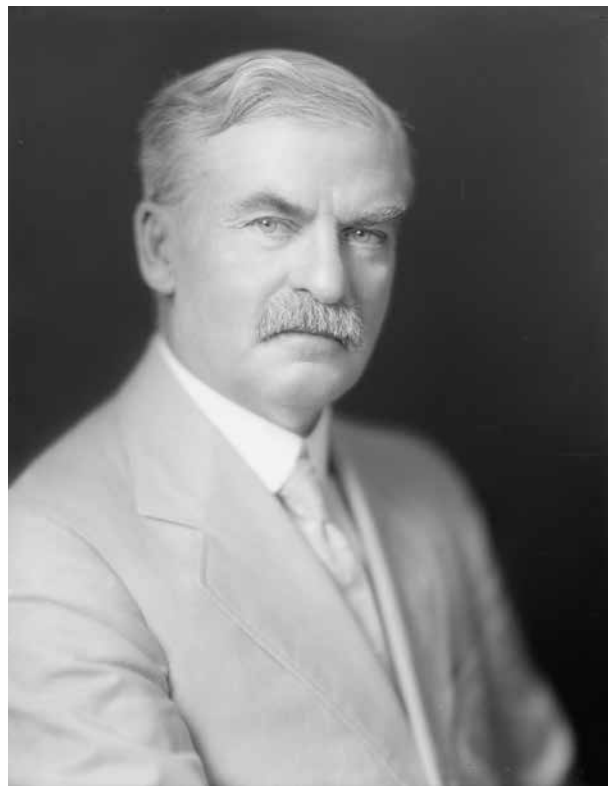
“Who Says a Watched Pot Never Boils?” by W. T. Enright, 1924. Library of Congress.

reserves through competitive bidding. To facilitate that process, in 1921 President Warren G. Harding transferred control of the reserves from the navy to the Interior Department, which, at that time, was led by the president's poker-playing buddy, Secretary of the Interior Albert Fall. Before long, charges of corruption appeared.

On April 14, 1922, the *Wall Street Journal* reported a secret arrangement in which Fall, without competitive bidding, had leased the Teapot Dome reserve to two oil companies controlled by personal friends, prompting calls for a congressional inquiry. On April 15, Wyoming senator John Kendrick introduced a resolution to investigate the leases. Since Kendrick was a Democrat and in the minority, Wisconsin's Robert La Follette, a Republican, arranged for the Committee on Public Lands to lead the investigation, but the committee's chairman, Reed Smoot of Utah, expected it to be a tedious and likely futile inquiry not worthy of his attention. So, he assigned the task to the panel's most junior minority member—Thomas Walsh.⁷⁹

Walsh's investigation got off to a slow start. As the scandal gained notoriety in the press, Walsh spent a year studying leases and examining contracts. His findings suggested wrongdoing, but the details were complicated and hard to pin down. Witnesses proved to be elusive or uncooperative. In March of 1923, Albert Fall bowed to public pressure and resigned as secretary, prompting some of Walsh's colleagues to advise him to not "kick the dog while he was down." But Walsh—described as a hard-boiled lawyer from the copper country—persisted. Once "he takes hold of anything," explained a reporter, "he never lets go."⁸⁰

Committee hearings began in October of 1923. Early developments were unspectacular and largely



Senator Thomas Walsh. Library of Congress.

ignored. Then, in November, Walsh discovered that Albert Fall had become surprisingly rich. After a decade of owing back taxes on his New Mexico ranch, Fall had suddenly paid his tax bill in full. Fall's once dilapidated ranch had been transformed into a luxurious, modern showplace that boasted the best quality livestock. Where did Albert Fall get all that money?⁸¹

Over the course of the next several months, Walsh continued his investigation, revealing that Fall had issued no-bid oil reserve leases in exchange for generous, illegal gifts worth nearly a half-million dollars. Thanks to Thomas Walsh's unrelenting—and nearly single-handed—pursuit of the facts, Albert Fall went to prison, the leases were revoked, and "Teapot Dome" gained a permanent entry in our political lexicon.⁸²

Senate Leaders Compete

In 1928, for the first and to date only time, the Senate's two floor leaders competed against each other in a general election. The prize they sought was the vice presidency. Majority Leader Charles Curtis of Kansas joined Herbert Hoover on the Republican presidential ticket, while Minority Leader Joseph Robinson of Arkansas paired with Democratic nominee Alfred Smith.

Joe Robinson had come to the Senate in 1913. Passionately dedicated to his job, he arrived early, went home late, and probably dreamed about legislation.



Senators Charles Curtis, left, and Joseph Robinson.
Library of Congress.

He championed laws to abolish child labor and led efforts to approve the Treaty of Versailles. Intimidating and volatile, Robinson was often involved in angry debates and was not averse to punching his opponents when they annoyed him. Robinson became Democratic floor leader in 1923.⁸³

Charles Curtis had entered the Senate in 1907 as a strong supporter of women's rights. He campaigned for female suffrage and sponsored the Equal Rights Amendment. No one considered him a radical, a reporter quipped, "but the feminists . . . called him friend." In 1925 Curtis became the Republican floor leader. Like Robinson, Curtis was an effective speaker, but he preferred a quieter approach. As leader, Curtis typically sat in the back of the Chamber and seldom addressed the Senate. He thought that oratory had little to do with passing legislation.⁸⁴

By the late 1920s, Republicans had dominated the presidency for nearly three decades. In fact, since the Civil War every president but two had been a Republican. Democrats hoped to break that trend in 1928 by nominating New York governor Al Smith, but Smith had three major disadvantages—he was a Roman Catholic, he was "wet" on the Prohibition issue, and he was a northeastern liberal. To attract southern and western voters, Democrats chose as running mate Joe Robinson—a southerner, a Protestant, and a "dry." As one pundit wrote, the Democratic donkey had a "wet head" but wagged "a dry tail."⁸⁵

Republicans also faced an electoral dilemma that year. Conservatives felt uneasy with Herbert Hoover, the progressive secretary of commerce who was best known for post-war relief programs. When Hoover gained the nomination, therefore, party leaders engineered the selection of Charles Curtis as his running

mate. Curtis boasted strong conservative credentials, and his support for women's rights brought the promise of the female vote. For the first time in American history, this presidential ticket featured two candidates from states west of the Mississippi.

On November 6, 1928, Hoover won the election and Curtis took the vice-presidential prize, but it's not clear—historically—who was the real winner.

Over the next four years, Curtis suffered demotion to vice-presidential obscurity, and the economic crisis that doomed the Hoover presidency in 1932 also ended the vice president's political career. He returned to the practice of law. Joe Robinson, on the other hand, lost the vice-presidential election in 1928 but went on to enjoy a nice consolation prize. Four years later, he was promoted to Senate majority leader.⁸⁶

Southern Women Set the Stage

When it comes to the women of the Senate, the attention often goes to the remarkable career of Margaret Chase Smith. During her 33 years of congressional service, Smith paved the way for a growing number of women pursuing a career in politics. It should be noted, however, that this Republican from the northern state of Maine was not the first woman to serve in the Senate. In fact, before Smith arrived in 1949, six women had already served—and the first four came from the South.

Rebecca Felton of Georgia led the way. Appointed to fill a vacancy in 1922, Felton broke a barrier that had kept women out of the Senate since 1789. A decade later, Arkansas's Hattie Caraway took office. First appointed, then elected and reelected, she served nearly 14 years and was the first woman to chair a committee. Rose Long, widow of Louisiana senator Huey Long, joined the list in 1935. She won a special election and served for a year before retiring to private life. Next came Dixie Bibb Graves. "Miss Dixie," as she was called, was well known in her home state of Alabama. Long active in women's organizations and state politics, Graves was a strong proponent for women's rights and a founding member of the Alabama Equal Suffrage

Association. She also was married to Alabama governor David Bibb Graves.⁸⁷

In 1937 Governor Graves faced a difficult decision. When Hugo Black left the Senate that year to accept a seat on the Supreme Court, it was the governor's duty to fill the vacancy, but Alabama's Democratic Party was split between those who favored the policies of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and those who opposed Roosevelt's New Deal. The governor was a loyal New Deal man and he—along with President Roosevelt—favored Congressman Lister Hill for the Senate seat. Since Hill needed time to mount a campaign, appointing a placeholder to the vacant seat seemed the best solution. President Roosevelt recommended Dixie Graves, since the politically astute wife of the governor could be counted on to cast pro-New Deal votes. On August 20, 1937, Governor Graves appointed his wife as senator.⁸⁸

Needless to say, this appointment caused a bit of a stir. Some charged the governor with nepotism and power grabbing or accused him of lining his family pockets with public money. Not surprisingly, many of the complaints were tainted by sexism. "Isn't it pitiful that Alabama has not an available man for the job?" asked one critic. Mrs. Graves had



Senators Hattie Caraway, left, and Dixie Bibb Graves. Library of Congress.

charm, another admitted, but the Senate required the “statesmanship of a hard-headed fighting man.” Others suggested that Mrs. Graves couldn’t have been a very good cook, otherwise her husband would have preferred to keep her at home rather than sending her to the Senate.⁸⁹

Dixie Graves’s term in the Senate was short—just 144 days—but it was by no means uneventful. She quickly gained press attention as she enthusiastically embraced her Senate duties. Within weeks, she delivered her maiden speech and even presided

over the Senate—a true rarity for women of the time. Before long, there was talk of election to a full term, but Graves chose not to run. She left the Senate in January of 1938, making way for the newly elected senator, Lister Hill.⁹⁰

Along with Felton, Caraway, and Long, Dixie Graves promoted a fuller participation of women in politics. These four daughters of the South helped to alter public attitudes and redefine the role of women in the Senate. In other words, they helped to set the stage for Margaret Chase Smith.

The Election of Hattie Caraway

“I pitched a coin and heads came [up] three times,” Hattie Wyatt Caraway noted in her diary, adding, “I really want to try out my own theory of a woman running for office.” Her male competitors joked that she would be lucky to attract one percent of the vote, but they failed to take into account the tenacity of the widow from Arkansas.⁹¹

Born in Bakerville, Tennessee, on February 1, 1878, Hattie Wyatt was the daughter of a farmer and shopkeeper. Despite the family’s modest means, Hattie was fortunate to receive an education and graduated

from Dickson Normal School in 1896. She became a teacher and in 1902 married an ambitious young lawyer named Thaddeus Caraway. They settled in Jonesboro, Arkansas, where Hattie managed their small farm while Thad practiced law and pursued a political career. In 1912 Thad Caraway was elected to the House of Representatives, and in 1921 he moved to the Senate.

Over the next decade, as Thad’s political career flourished, Hattie Caraway was constantly at his side. She helped to run his Senate office, became a



Senator Hattie Caraway. Library of Congress.

familiar face on Capitol Hill, and gained a reputation as an intelligent and witty Senate spouse. Then tragedy struck. In 1931 Thad Caraway died of complications from kidney stone surgery. His death left his Senate seat vacant and Hattie Caraway a grieving widow with three sons and no means of support. To make matters worse, she learned that her husband had been in debt, and before long her stately home went on the auction block. When Arkansas governor Harvey Parnell offered her an appointment to fill her husband's seat, and the senatorial salary that came with it, Hattie Caraway gratefully accepted. She also agreed to run in a required special election to fill out the one-year remainder of the term. She won that special election on January 12, 1932, becoming the first woman to be elected to the Senate—thereby assuring her inclusion in the history books—but the heart of this story is yet to come.⁹²

Four months later, on May 9, 1932, on the eve of the filing deadline and to the surprise of nearly everyone, Caraway declared her candidacy for the full Senate term. “I’m in for crucifixion,” she concluded, then added, “I won’t be the first woman who has been sacrificed to the ambition of some man.” As she launched her campaign, the challenges faced by any woman running for elective office soon became apparent. “Many nasty letters,” she confided to her diary on June 6, 1932, as she hit the campaign trail in Arkansas.⁹³

The highlight of Caraway’s 1932 campaign came in August, when the controversial Louisiana senator Huey Long joined her for a weeklong road trip nicknamed the “Hattie and Huey Tour.” As they stormed through Arkansas on trucks outfitted with loudspeakers, Long frequently described Caraway as the “little woman” fighting against the big political

interests. “We’re here to pull a lot of pot-bellied politicians off a little woman’s neck,” he bellowed to one crowd. This “brave little woman senator stood by you,” he told another, despite the fact “that the big men politicians of her own state had their feet on her throat.” Giving her own stump speeches alongside the Louisiana senator, Caraway won the election by a comfortable margin.⁹⁴

Despite this success, Caraway remained a bit of a curiosity in the Senate. “Sometimes, I’m really afraid that tourists are going to poke me with their umbrellas,” she complained in 1937. “And yet there’s no sound reason why women, if they have the time and ability, shouldn’t sit with men on city councils, in state legislatures or in the House and Senate.” She rarely spoke on the Senate floor, preferring the smaller setting of the committee room, and the male-dominated press corps labeled her “Silent Hattie.” By the mid-1930s, however, Caraway was delivering speeches at major political rallies and promoting legislation to aid depression-era Arkansas. Reelected in 1938, she served in the Senate until January 3, 1945. Through the years, Caraway gained the respect of her Senate colleagues, who awarded her with a standing ovation on her final day in office.⁹⁵

Caraway left an important, if flawed, legacy. Despite her dedicated efforts to aid her Arkansas constituents, she failed in her service to African Americans. Throughout her Senate career, Caraway routinely opposed civil rights legislation, including anti-lynching bills, and ignored the often dire circumstances of her Black constituents. Her lasting legacy lies not in her legislative efforts, however, but in her decision—a bold decision in 1932—to run for a full Senate term. That brave step opened the doors for other women to follow.

The First Hundred Days

“The First Hundred Days” have become a benchmark for the early success (or failure) of every presidential administration since the 1930s. It began with Franklin D. Roosevelt. On July 24, 1933, in one of his famous “fireside chats,” President Roosevelt offered an assessment of the “crowding events of the hundred days” devoted to the “starting of the wheels of the New Deal.” Since that time, every new president has been measured by FDR’s yardstick.⁹⁶

“Vigorous, new leadership [has emerged] after a slow start as General [Dwight D.] Eisenhower nears completion of his first hundred days,” reported the *New York Times* in 1953. The first hundred days of the John F. Kennedy administration, “which began with a rosy glow of promises, ends tomorrow edged with dark clouds of concern,” suggested the *Chicago Daily Tribune* in 1961. The *Washington Post* reported in 1977 that “Government-on-the-run” characterized the first hundred days of the Jimmy Carter administration. “Everything has been debated, but nothing has been settled,” complained a reporter after Ronald Reagan’s first hundred days.⁹⁷

This may be a handy tool for presidential assessment, but it has one major flaw. In 1933 Roosevelt was not referring to *his* first hundred days in office. He was discussing the hundred days of a special session of the 73rd Congress. By any measurement, those hundred days stretching from March 9 to June 17, 1933, were remarkably productive, including passage of 15 major bills, such as the Federal Emergency Relief Act, the Agricultural Adjustment Act, the Tennessee Valley Authority, and the National Industrial Recovery Act, to name just a few. President Roosevelt typically gets the credit for such legislation, but most of those



President Franklin D. Roosevelt addresses the nation in his first Fireside Chat, March 12, 1933. Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, National Archives.

initiatives originated in Congress, and all of them had to be written, debated, and passed by the Senate and the House. The Tennessee Valley Authority, championed by Nebraska senator George Norris, had already passed Congress twice by 1933 but had been vetoed by Presidents Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover. Representative Henry Steagall and Senator Arthur Vandenberg guided through federal deposit insurance, since FDR was skeptical of the whole idea. Those “wheels of the New Deal” described by Roosevelt were powered by Congress.

If this opening session of the New Deal era was so productive, why did it last only a hundred days? Had Congress met the challenges of the Great Depression by June of 1933? Had senators run out of legislative

proposals? Not at all. It was the summer heat that drove legislators out of Washington, and they didn't return until the following January. In those days before effective air conditioning, Congress seldom worked past June.

It's often noted that the "Hundred Days" report card sets an unrealistic standard for each new president. After all, the first hundred days of the New

Deal took place during a national crisis. The desperate circumstances of the Great Depression called for dramatic action, and legislative activity was fueled by Roosevelt's landslide election. It could be argued, however, that this critique misses the historical mark. When discussing the First Hundred Days, forget about the president. Instead, pay attention to the challenges faced by Congress during such difficult times.⁹⁸



Senator George Norris. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

Joseph Robinson and the Court Packing Plan

On a humid July morning in 1937, a housekeeper entered a Capitol Hill apartment and made a tragic discovery. Sprawled on the floor was the body of the Senate majority leader. Arkansas senator Joseph Robinson had never lost a battle—from schoolyard fights to high-power political clashes, he beat every challenger—but that morning Robinson met his match.⁹⁹

Born in 1872, Robinson was the ninth of 10 children and quickly learned to command attention by

showing off his physical strength as well as his intellectual power. Trained in law, he succeeded in the courtroom, then won election to the House of Representatives in 1902. Elected governor a decade later, he barely had been inaugurated when a Senate vacancy prompted the Arkansas state legislature to send him back to Washington, D.C. On March 10, 1913, Robinson began a remarkable 24-year Senate career.¹⁰⁰

Joe Robinson quickly became known as one of the Senate’s hardest workers—and fiercest fighters.



Senator Joseph Robinson, right, with President Franklin D. Roosevelt and others, 1937. Library of Congress.

When Joe went “into one of his rages,” noted a Senate staff member, “it took little imagination to see fire and smoke rolling out of his mouth like some fierce dragon.” He could make everyone “quake by the burning fire in his eyes, the baring of his teeth as he ground out his words, and the clenching of his mighty fists as he beat on the desk before him.” Colleagues nicknamed him “Scrappy Joe,” and the label stuck.¹⁰¹

Robinson was soon a leader of the Democratic Party, and in 1923 his Senate colleagues unanimously elected him as party floor leader. A decade later, when Democrats took control of the Senate, Robinson’s dedication and steadfast party loyalty largely defined the role of majority leader but also prompted an enduring question. When the leader shares party affiliation with the president, what is his or her role? Senate leader or the president’s agent in the Senate?¹⁰²

Joe Robinson became the president’s agent during Franklin D. Roosevelt’s first term, steering significant New Deal legislation through the Senate to passage. When Roosevelt began his second term in 1937, Robinson again responded, but the president’s new agenda proved to be particularly controversial. Just days after his second inauguration, Roosevelt announced a

judicial reform plan. Frustrated with court rulings that undermined his policies, the president proposed expanding the Supreme Court’s membership to 15, allowing him to “pack the court” with as many as six new justices. The success of this daring plan depended upon the president’s agent in the Senate, and this time Robinson had a vested interest—Roosevelt had suggested that the next open seat on the Supreme Court would go to the Arkansas senator.¹⁰³

As weeks passed and rising heat and humidity tested the endurance of many, senators argued over a reform plan that infuriated Republicans and divided Democrats. A determined Robinson pursued compromise after compromise. Finally, by the second week of July, he believed the Court packing bill had the votes to pass. But Roosevelt’s liberalized Supreme Court, and Robinson’s coveted spot on the high bench, were not to be. On the morning of July 14, Robinson’s pajama-clad body was found lying face down on his apartment floor. A copy of the *Congressional Record* rested beside him. Joe Robinson had finally met an unbeatable foe—he died of a heart attack. Without Roosevelt’s loyal agent in the Senate, the Court packing plan soon suffered a similar fate.¹⁰⁴

Winston Churchill Addresses Congress

Capitol Hill was abuzz with activity on December 26, 1941. Shortly after noon, British prime minister Winston Churchill passed by a large crowd of spectators and entered the Capitol, then proceeded to the Senate Chamber where he took his place at a lectern. Microphones had been installed to record the historic speech, and above his head, powerful lamps illuminated the normally dim

Senate Chamber. Less than three weeks had passed since the attack on Pearl Harbor, and Churchill had come to Washington, D.C., to coordinate military strategy with President Franklin D. Roosevelt.¹⁰⁵

Arriving just days before Christmas, the prime minister met with government officials, held a joint press conference with Roosevelt, joined the president for the ceremonial lighting of the Christmas Tree, and

on Christmas Day attended services at Foundry Methodist Church. Everywhere he went, Churchill drew cheers and applause. “In less than a week’s time,” the *Washington Post* reported, “Americans have caught on to one of Winston Churchill’s major characteristics—his ability to thrill a crowd.” The highlight of Churchill’s visit came on the 26th when he addressed a joint meeting of Congress.¹⁰⁶

Coming in the midst of the holiday season, when many senators and representatives were out of town, leaders held the joint meeting in the more intimate Senate Chamber. As Churchill began his speech, all 96 desks were occupied, and the galleries overflowed with members’ families and friends. “If my father had

been an American, and my mother British, instead of the other way around,” Churchill remarked, “I might have gotten here on my own. In that case,” he added, “this would not have been the first time you would have heard my voice.” He then grimly predicted that Allied forces would require many months to turn the tide of war, warning that “many disappointments and unpleasant surprises await us.” The leaders of the Axis powers, these “wicked men” he called them, had brought evil forces into play. They must “know they will be called to terrible account.”¹⁰⁷

Filmed for newsreels and broadcast nationally over radio, Churchill’s rousing speech prompted cries of “Hear, Hear” and the flashing of V for victory signs



British Prime Minister Winston Churchill addresses Congress, December 26, 1941. Library of Congress.

in the Chamber. It was a speech “full of bubbling humor . . . , stern courage—and hard facts,” reported the *New York Times*, adding that it was met with “wild

bursts of enthusiasm.” This was not Churchill’s only address to Congress. He returned in 1943 and again in 1952, a remarkable honor for a foreign leader.¹⁰⁸

Alben Barkley Resigns Leadership Post

The relationship between Senate leader and president is never an easy one. The battles between Henry Clay and Andrew Jackson are well documented, for example, as are the monumental clashes of Henry Cabot Lodge with Woodrow Wilson. Even when the leader and the president share the same party affiliation, there is an inherent conflict that is part of the nation’s system of constitutional checks and balances. At times, even the best of executive-senatorial relationships can be tested.

When the Senate convened on February 23, 1944, everyone expected a routine day to unfold, but suddenly the atmosphere changed. “The opening prayer had just been finished,” noted the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, “when the word was whispered . . . that Barkley was going to resign.” Clerks heard “gasps of surprise” as senators rushed to their seats and reporters filled the press gallery. Something dramatic was about to happen. Democrat Alben Barkley of Kentucky, the Senate’s majority leader, was about to resign his leadership post—in protest!¹⁰⁹

What prompted such drastic action? The previous month, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had sent to Congress a bill to provide a \$10 billion tax increase to help defray the cost of wartime activities. When the Senate Finance Committee reported out the bill, however, it provided only a fraction of Roosevelt’s requested amount. Majority Leader Barkley had worked hard to find a compromise and was

convinced that the scaled-back authorization represented the committee’s best attempt at meeting Roosevelt’s demand. Barkley implored the president to approve the measure, but Roosevelt ignored the Senate leader, denounced Congress in a stinging message, and vetoed the bill.¹¹⁰

For nearly a dozen years, Barkley had been a loyal supporter of the president, who had played a key role in Barkley’s election to the post. When Barkley became majority leader in 1937, he quickly solidified his reputation as a presidential ally. Since that time, Barkley had been a reliable champion for the administration, but the president’s veto of the tax bill that Barkley had worked so hard to craft was more than the leader could stand.¹¹¹

On that February day, Barkley entered the Senate Chamber in a “cold fury.” Ignoring the political consequences, he denounced the president for blaming Congress for “universal dissatisfaction with tax complexities.” He branded the president’s veto message as a “calculated and deliberate assault upon the legislative integrity” of every member of Congress. Stating that he had called a meeting of the Democratic caucus for the next morning, Barkley announced, “My resignation will be tendered and my services [as majority leader] terminated.” Then he added: “If the Congress . . . has any self-respect left, it will override the [president’s] veto.” As Barkley yielded the floor, the Senate erupted into wild applause. The leader’s resignation wasn’t a mere



Senator Tom Connally, left, and Majority Leader Alben Barkley. Library of Congress.

bombshell, proclaimed the *Los Angeles Times*, it was a “four-ton block buster.”¹¹²

On February 24, as promised, Barkley convened the majority caucus, tearfully resigned as party leader, and left the room. Minutes later, Texas senator Tom Connally emerged from the closed-door meeting. “Make way for liberty!” he cried as he led a group of cheering senators to Barkley’s office. They informed the Kentucky senator that he had been unanimously reelected as leader. “Previously, he spoke to us for

the president,” one senator commented, but “now he speaks for us to the president.”¹¹³

Barkley’s break with Roosevelt probably cost him that year’s vice-presidential nomination—it went to Harry Truman instead—but two days after his dramatic protest, the House and Senate fulfilled Barkley’s request. They overrode the president’s veto and passed the bill. Barkley had won the day. He also won the vice presidency—in 1948, when he became Harry Truman’s vice president.¹¹⁴

The Truman Committee Investigates

Harry Truman graced the cover of *Time* magazine many times during his lifetime, but his first appearance was arguably the most notable. On March 8, 1943, *Time* featured “Investigator Truman” and noted that “A democracy has to keep an eye on itself.” As chairman of what *Time* named “one of the most useful Government agencies of World War II,” Truman’s bold, thorough Senate investigation of defense spending catapulted this one-time farmer and haberdasher turned senator into the national spotlight.¹¹⁵

First elected to the Senate in 1934, Harry Truman took the oath of office for a second term on January 3, 1941. It should have been a happy occasion, but those were troubling days as the nation edged closer to war. “We had suddenly realized that we were unprepared to face the dangers that confronted us,” Truman later recalled, “and had begun a frantic attempt to remedy that situation.” The German occupation of France and the Netherlands prodded a reluctant Congress to hastily appropriate billions of dollars to bolster the nation’s defense. Washington, D.C., Truman observed, was



Senator Harry Truman and committee members at the Ford Motor Company, April 13, 1942. Library of Congress.



Truman Committee hearing, 1942. Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, National Archives.

“full of people seeking defense contracts,” but were the taxpayers getting their money’s worth?¹¹⁶

Determined to find out, Truman hit the road. He visited military camps and manufacturing sites throughout the country to see how tax dollars were being spent. “The trip was an eye-opener,” he recalled, one that convinced him to propose a Senate committee to examine the “national defense program and the handling of contracts.” The Senate approved the idea and selected Truman as chairman. Affable and well-liked by members of both parties, Truman pledged to lead a fair investigation, but the committee’s initial shoestring budget of \$15,000 required him to think creatively. He invited the public to report cases of waste and fraud in their own communities, and the press soon joined the effort. “Just how efficiently and conscientiously, Mr. and Mrs. American, is your money being put to the

purpose you intend?” queried one newspaper. Thousands of Americans responded. Their letters became the basis for some of the panel’s most important investigations.¹¹⁷

Throughout the war years, the committee’s witness list was a veritable “who’s who” of government officials, top military brass, and titans of industry. The committee scolded Standard Oil for intentionally restricting the nation’s rubber supply. Senators charged Curtiss-Wright (then the nation’s largest defense contractor) with knowingly approving faulty engines. As reporters noted, Truman was not afraid to tackle the powerful industries and those who ran them. In fact, *Business Week* noted that a mere rumor that the committee planned to investigate a defense contract was often “sufficient to force a cure of abuses.” Although the Truman Committee deliberately avoided criticizing military strategy or

tactics, it carefully documented how the military spent money. “No military man knows anything about money,” Truman often said; “All they know how to do is spend it.”¹¹⁸

Truman reveled in the work and in the attention it brought him. In a letter to his wife Bess, he boasted, “I’m on the front pages of the *Kansas City Star*, the *St. Louis Star-Times*, and the *Kansas City Journal*.” After three years as the nation’s chief

investigator, Truman once again graced the cover of *Time* magazine, this time as a vice-presidential candidate. Truman moved to the vice presidency in 1945 and then, just 83 days later, to the presidency, but the work of the Truman Committee continued under new leadership. In 1948 it became the Senate’s Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations—still in operation today—a lasting tribute to the diligent work of “Investigator Truman.”¹¹⁹

Arthur Vandenberg and a Bipartisan Foreign Policy

Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan delivered a celebrated speech “heard ’round the world” on January 10, 1945. It marked his conversion from isolationism to internationalism. It also launched his quest for a bipartisan foreign policy.¹²⁰

Born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1884, Vandenberg quickly exhibited an intelligent and entrepreneurial spirit. At age nine, he took a job delivering small freight with a push cart. By age 10, he had three other boys doing the pushing for him. After college he studied law at the University of Michigan but chose a career in journalism, editing the *Grand Rapids Herald* for two decades. Appointed to the Senate in 1928, he later won election to the seat and held it for the rest of his life.¹²¹

Like many Americans, Vandenberg had become staunchly isolationist by the 1920s. A visit to Europe in 1935 convinced him of the possibility of another war, and he became determined to keep the United States out of it. The attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, and the war that followed, gradually altered his views. “Since Pearl Harbor,” he

explained, “World War II has put the gory science of mass murder into new and sinister perspective. Our oceans have ceased to be moats which automatically protect our ramparts.”¹²²

Vandenberg delivered his famous speech just three weeks before President Franklin D. Roosevelt joined British prime minister Winston Churchill and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin at the Yalta Conference. The speech served as a rallying cry for Republicans and Democrats alike. The old isolationist called on America to assume the responsibilities of world leadership and endorsed the creation of the United Nations. A month later, Roosevelt announced a bipartisan delegation to attend the United Nations Conference on International Organization, scheduled to meet in San Francisco in April, to draft a United Nations charter. Leading the Republicans in that delegation was Vandenberg. Thus, by 1945 Vandenberg had accepted an international role for the United States, but he also injected a bipartisan congressional voice into foreign relations. Deploing the wartime secrecy of



Senator Arthur Vandenberg. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

the Roosevelt administration, Vandenberg called for what he termed the continuing “honest candor” between the White House and Congress.¹²³

In 1947 Republicans gained control of the Senate for the first time in 14 years. Vandenberg became chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations, where his ability to gain Democratic support while maintaining Republican unity made him an effective dealmaker. With Harry S. Truman as president, Vandenberg forged bipartisan support for the Truman Doctrine, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the European Recovery Program, better known as the Marshall Plan. Support for the

latter was difficult for Vandenberg, but he decided it was necessary. “If self-help and self-sufficiency can be made to work,” he reasoned, then the Marshall Plan “may well be a bargain.”¹²⁴

As Republicans prepared for the 1948 presidential election, pitting Truman against New York governor Thomas Dewey, they asked the Michigan senator to write the foreign policy plank of the Republican platform. The result was quintessential Vandenberg. Drawing upon language from 19th-century policymaking, Vandenberg invited both Republicans and Democrats to join forces in “stopping partisan politics at the water’s edge.”¹²⁵

Senator Smith's Declaration of Conscience

As Senator Margaret Chase Smith of Maine boarded the Senate subway for the short underground ride from her office building to the Capitol, she encountered the junior senator from Wisconsin, Joseph McCarthy. “Margaret, you look very serious,” McCarthy said. “Are you going to make a speech?” Without hesitation, Smith replied, “Yes, and you will not like it!” The date was June 1, 1950, and Smith was about to deliver the most memorable speech of her long career.¹²⁶

Four months earlier, McCarthy had rocketed to national attention. In a well-publicized speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, he claimed to possess the names of 205 card-carrying Communists in the State

Department. Almost overnight, he became a media sensation. As his notoriety grew, his charges became more reckless. Smith, like many of her colleagues, shared McCarthy’s concerns about Communist subversion, but she grew skeptical when he repeatedly ignored her requests for evidence to back up his accusations. “It was then,” she recalled, “that I began to wonder about the validity . . . and fairness of Joseph McCarthy’s charges.”¹²⁷

As McCarthy grabbed headlines, few senators dared to challenge him. Maryland senator Millard Tydings led an investigation into McCarthy’s accusations, and New Mexico senator Dennis Chavez expressed his concerns about a growing paranoia, but they were both Democrats. McCarthy was a Republican; therefore, their criticism could be dismissed on partisan grounds. Margaret Chase Smith, on the other hand, was a loyal Republican, and she hesitated to speak. “I was a freshman Senator,” she explained, “and in those days, freshman Senators were to be seen and not heard.” She hoped a senior member would take the lead, but that didn’t happen. “This great psychological fear . . . spread to the Senate,” she noted, “where a considerable amount of mental paralysis and muteness set in for fear of offending McCarthy.” As the weeks passed, Smith grew increasingly angry with McCarthy’s attacks and his defamation of individuals she considered above suspicion. She decided it was time to speak out. Bowing to Senate rules and practices on comity, Smith chose not to attack McCarthy personally. Instead, she denounced the tactics that were becoming associated with the term “McCarthyism.”¹²⁸

“Mr. President,” she began, “I would like to speak briefly and simply about a serious national



“Go Upstairs and Wash Your Hands,” by Herbert Block, June 4, 1950, depicting Senator Margaret Chase Smith’s rebuke of McCarthyism and its supporters. Library of Congress.

condition. . . . The United States Senate has long enjoyed worldwide respect as the greatest deliberative body in the world. But recently that deliberative character has too often been debased to the level of a forum of hate and character assassination sheltered by the shield of congressional immunity.” In her 15-minute address, delivered as McCarthy looked on, Smith endorsed every American’s right to criticize, to protest, and to hold unpopular beliefs. “Freedom of speech is not what it used to be in America,” she complained. “It has been so abused by some that it is not exercised by others.” Looking ahead to the fall elections, she demanded of her fellow Republicans that they not ride to political victory on the “Four Horsemen of Calumny—Fear, Ignorance, Bigotry, and Smear.” As she concluded, Smith introduced a statement signed by herself and six other Republican senators. She called it her “Declaration of Conscience.”¹²⁹

Smith’s speech stirred both support and criticism. “This cool breeze of honesty from Maine can blow the whole miasma out of the nation’s soul,” commented the *Hartford Courant*. “By one act of political courage, [Smith has] justified a lifetime in politics,” commented another. *Newsweek* magazine ran a cover story entitled “Senator Smith: A Woman Vice President?” Critics called her Moscow-loving and much worse. McCarthy dismissed Smith and her supporters as “Snow White and the Six Dwarfs.”¹³⁰

Not surprisingly, McCarthy counterattacked the senators who opposed him. Maryland’s Millard Tydings, for example, fell victim to a McCarthy-led smear campaign that cost him reelection in 1950. This put senators on notice—support McCarthy or face possible defeat at the polls. Smith was not up for reelection in 1950, but in what was labeled a “political spanking,” she was denied important committee assignments and endured repeated attacks by McCarthy and his allies. Yet, she never backed down. In one



Senator Margaret Chase Smith. Margaret Chase Smith Library.

exchange in 1951, McCarthy dismissed her as “a mental midget,” prompting Smith to reply, “I shall not permit intimidation to keep me from expressing my honest convictions.” The real battle came in 1954, when Smith did face reelection for a second term. McCarthy handpicked a candidate to challenge her in the Republican primary, funneled large amounts of money into that campaign, and then launched a speaking tour to defeat her. His efforts failed. Smith’s support among Maine voters—in addition to McCarthy’s slump in public support following the televised Army-McCarthy hearings of that year—earned her a stunning victory in the June 21 primary and an easy win in the fall election.¹³¹

Smith’s Declaration of Conscience did not end McCarthy’s reign of power, but she was the first Republican senator to take such a strong stand. Her reelection victory in 1954 proved to be an even more important nail in McCarthy’s political coffin. His ability to silence his critics had been his primary

source of power, but the critic he had tried hardest to defeat had won a major victory, beating his chosen candidate. Margaret Chase Smith's 1954 victory proved decisively that senators could oppose McCarthy and still get reelected. As one contemporary noted, "If a mere woman could beat Joe McCarthy by a 5 to 1 margin, then why should men Senators

have any further fear of him?" Opposition to McCarthyism was no longer political suicide. On December 2, 1954, the Senate belatedly concurred with the "lady from Maine" and censured Joe McCarthy for conduct "contrary to senatorial traditions." McCarthy's Senate career was all but over. Margaret Chase Smith's career was just beginning.¹³²

The Suicide of Senator Lester Hunt

On a quiet Saturday morning in June of 1954, Wyoming senator Lester Hunt entered the Senate Office Building, exchanged pleasantries with a Capitol Police officer, and then proceeded to his third-floor office. Just minutes later, the police officer heard a gunshot. In the 1950s, there were many victims of Senator Joseph McCarthy's baseless charges. One of them was Lester Hunt.

A dentist by training, Hunt first ran for public office in 1932. His warm personality and boundless energy helped this conservative Democrat to win elections in a reliably Republican state. He served two years in the Wyoming state house, eight years as secretary of state, and seven years as governor before becoming a U.S. senator in 1949. In 1954 Hunt seemed poised for an easy reelection to a second term—except for the fact that he had crossed swords with Joe McCarthy.

Lester Hunt was one of the few senators to speak out against McCarthy and his crusade to expose Communists and other "subversives" in the federal government. Disgusted with McCarthy's witch-hunting tactics, Hunt publicly branded McCarthy as an opportunist, a liar, and a drunk. To thwart McCarthy's growing power, Hunt introduced legislation to allow witnesses to sue congressional committees for



Senator Lester Hunt. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

libel. The bill didn't pass, but McCarthy and his close circle of Senate allies never forgot the insult.¹³³

On June 8, 1954, in a surprising turn of events, Hunt announced that he would not seek a second term in the Senate. His friends and constituents were baffled. Why bring such a promising political career to an early end? They didn't know the backstory. A year

earlier, in June of 1953, Lester Hunt's son had been arrested in Lafayette Square in downtown Washington, D.C., for allegedly soliciting an undercover male police officer. The police charged young Buddy Hunt with a misdemeanor—common practice for a first offense—and released him to his parents. In that era of vicious persecution of homosexuals, the Hunt family hoped the incident would be forgotten. It wasn't.¹³⁴

Senator Herman Welker of Idaho, one of McCarthy's most loyal surrogates, learned of the arrest and seized the opportunity to discredit one of McCarthy's critics. Withdraw from reelection, Welker warned Hunt, or face the exposure of Buddy and the associated publicity. Hunt refused, responding that he would not be blackmailed out of public office, and the intimidation continued. Joined by New Hampshire senator Styles Bridges, one of the Senate's most powerful members, the McCarthy loyalists pressured a D.C. police inspector into pursuing Buddy Hunt's case. Senator Hunt's son was convicted and fined, and the pressure on Hunt to withdraw continued.

As weeks passed, Senator Hunt became increasingly despondent. He would not dine with colleagues and rarely entered the Senate Chamber. Hoping to avoid publicity and bring peace to his family, he announced he was leaving the Senate, confiding to journalist Drew Pearson that he "had been living under the fear of political blackmail." The burden had become too much. Lester Hunt committed suicide in his Senate office on June 19, 1954. He "could not bear the thought of having his son's misfortunes become the subject of whispers," Pearson concluded.¹³⁵

"Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the Communist Party?" McCarthy and his fellow investigators famously asked, but forgotten is a question that often followed. "Information has come to our attention that you are a homosexual. What comment do you care to make?" The systematic persecution of gays and lesbians during the McCarthy era—the so-called "lavender scare"—also claimed many victims, including Lester Hunt.¹³⁶

Senator Watkins Leads the Charge for Censure

Outside of his home state, Arthur Watkins is a mostly forgotten figure today, but this Utah senator played a unique and important role in Senate history. In 1954 he tackled one of the Senate's toughest jobs and challenged one of its most menacing foes.

Born in Midway, Utah, in 1886, Arthur Watkins was a descendent of a pioneering Mormon family. Shy and scholarly by nature, he attended Brigham Young University and then studied law at Columbia University, earning his degree in 1912. Over the next three decades, Watkins practiced law, became

a judge, rose in stature within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and championed the Deer Creek Water development project. In 1946 he won a seat in the Senate and was reelected in 1952. Watkins proved to be a hardworking senator, but his most important task was leading the charge to censure Joseph McCarthy.¹³⁷

The era of "McCarthyism" began with a speech in West Virginia. "While I cannot take the time to name all the men in the State Department who have been named as members of the Communist Party," McCarthy proclaimed on February 9, 1950, "I have

here in my hand a list of 205.” Despite his many claims, McCarthy had no list and failed to produce evidence to support his accusations, but over the next four years he managed to disrupt politics and ruin careers. Finally, in 1954, a majority of the Senate had heard enough. On July 30, Vermont senator Ralph Flanders introduced a resolution of censure. Three days later, the Senate established a bipartisan select committee to consider the more than 40 charges of misconduct made against McCarthy. Consisting of six senators known for their legal expertise and impeccable reputations, that committee was chaired by Arthur Watkins.¹³⁸

Chairman Watkins plotted every move with care, hoping to avoid sensationalism. When hearings began, he excluded television cameras but allowed McCarthy to participate. True to form, McCarthy constantly disrupted proceedings, tried to intimidate witnesses, and disparaged committee members. “Is it true or false,” he would demand before throwing out yet another unfounded charge. Through it all, Watkins held firm, repeatedly pounding the gavel to maintain order. The committee “[will] not be interrupted by diversions or sidelines,” he warned. When McCarthy persisted, Watkins slammed down the gavel and recessed overnight. As one reporter noted,



Senator Arthur Watkins, left, chairs the committee looking into misconduct by Senator Joseph McCarthy. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

Watkins was “determined to conduct an investigation” in which McCarthy “[could] neither dominate nor disrupt.”¹³⁹

On September 27, 1954, the committee reported to the full Senate, unanimously recommending censure, the Senate’s strongest form of discipline other than expulsion. McCarthy fought back, calling Watkins the “little coward from Utah” and declaring the committee to be a handmaiden to communism, but on December 2, 1954, the Senate censured McCarthy. The Wisconsin senator remained in office, but his career was finished. Ostracized by his party and ignored by the press, Joe McCarthy died a broken man three years later, a victim of his alcoholic excesses. And what of Arthur Watkins? He remained a symbol of senatorial integrity, but his opposition to McCarthy proved costly. Targeted by pro-McCarthy factions within his party, he lost his reelection bid in

1958. That was a price, Watkins concluded, that he was willing to pay.¹⁴⁰



Senator Joseph McCarthy, center. Library of Congress.

The First Televised Presidential Debate

Which presidential campaign produced the first nationally televised debate? The typical answer to that question is John Kennedy versus Richard Nixon in 1960. In fact, the first televised debate occurred four years earlier, when Democratic candidate Adlai Stevenson challenged incumbent Republican president Dwight Eisenhower—but those two men did not appear in the debate. Instead, on November 4, 1956, two surrogates debated the issues on network television: for the Democrats, former First Lady and party icon Eleanor Roosevelt; for the Republicans, Senator Margaret Chase Smith of Maine. The first televised presidential debate featured two women.

By 1956 Margaret Chase Smith was in her second term in the Senate and had known Eleanor Roosevelt

for nearly two decades. “I respected and admired Mrs. Roosevelt for her intelligence and active leadership,” wrote Smith in her autobiography. Smith had been a frequent visitor to the Roosevelt White House and had appeared on the First Lady’s radio program. They both published a newspaper column. By the mid-1950s, the names of both women appeared on lists of America’s most admired women.¹⁴¹

As the 1956 presidential campaign began, Roosevelt emerged as Adlai Stevenson’s strongest advocate. She played such a crucial role in cinching his nomination that she became known as the “Heroine of the Convention” and then proved to be a skilled campaigner. Senator Smith also was a seasoned politician by this time. Having gained national attention in 1950

for opposing McCarthyism, Smith's visibility grew in 1953 when she became the first woman to serve on the Senate Armed Services Committee. Her public status rose again with her world tour of 1954–55 that included televised interviews with foreign leaders. When the Republican National Committee was looking for a worthy opponent for Eleanor Roosevelt, Smith was the logical choice.¹⁴²

The forum for debate was the CBS program *Face the Nation*, then in its second season. This was the first time a woman appeared on that program. Although Smith was not yet sure of her debating skills, she was confident that she could offer a strong argument in support of President Eisenhower's policies. For that reason, she insisted on a two-minute closing statement, and CBS agreed. Smith then carefully calculated her choices in wardrobe and hairstyle to provide a contrast to

the grandmotherly Roosevelt. She also considered her demeanor. She had to be forceful, but polite; knowledgeable, yet demure. "I would answer the questions as briefly as possible," Smith decided, and in an "even-pitched tone."

The event took place two days before the election and focused almost entirely on issues of foreign policy. As planned, Smith remained poised and taciturn, a strategy that allowed the more talkative Roosevelt to dominate—until the closing statements. Then, Smith offered a forceful, concise argument that touched on many key issues. "What was surprising" about the final statement, Smith recalled, "was my abrupt change in delivery." It was not "the soft, restrained, measured delivery" of the debate; rather, "it was a biting staccato." This change in demeanor unnerved and angered Eleanor Roosevelt, who refused to shake hands after the debate.¹⁴³



Former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and Senator Margaret Chase Smith on *Face the Nation*, November 4, 1956. Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, National Archives.

Who won the debate? Public reaction was mixed, but one thing was clear—Margaret Chase Smith was informed and articulate, and she was savvy about television. Four years later, when she ran for reelection to her

Senate seat, Smith faced opponent Lucia Cormier in one of the first televised senatorial debates. By 1960 Margaret Chase Smith—unlike the two presidential candidates of that year—was already a veteran of TV debates.¹⁴⁴

African American Staff Challenge Segregation

African American men and women have always worked on Capitol Hill. Black laborers, enslaved and free, helped to construct the Capitol. In 1814 a Black messenger named Tobias Simpson was instrumental in saving Senate records as British troops burned the Capitol. William Lucas became a Senate employee in 1869 as a laborer and temporary clerk and remained on staff for the next 57 years. The first African American page, Andrew Slade, also arrived in the 1860s. African Americans worked as janitors, messengers, and carpenters. In the early 20th century, they also gained committee and clerical positions. With greater professional status, these new generations of Black staff waged their own battles against racial segregation.

In February 1947 an African American veteran named Thomas Thornton became a mail carrier for the Senate. One day, Thornton ordered a sandwich at a Senate luncheonette and sat down to eat his meal. This seemingly innocuous act violated a long-standing Senate practice of maintaining separate dining facilities for Black staff. When an attendant asked Thornton to leave, he refused. Word of the dispute spread, and *Washington Post* reporter Drew Pearson noted that Thornton's actions earned him a reprimand from the sergeant at arms. Thornton was instructed never to dine in Senate facilities.¹⁴⁵

That same year a Black correspondent for the *Atlanta Daily World*, Louis Lautier, demanded



Louis Lautier. Scurlock Studio Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

admission to the Senate's all-White daily press gallery. The Standing Committee on Correspondents, a group of journalists tasked with regulating the press galleries, rejected Lautier's application, saying he failed to meet the qualifications of gallery membership. Lautier denounced the decision as discriminatory and appealed to the Senate Rules Committee. "In the Capitol of the greatest free country in the world," Lautier argued, "we certainly should have no discrimination."

On March 18, 1947, the Rules Committee voted unanimously to approve Lautier's admission to the daily press gallery—a major victory for Black journalists and another battle won for Black Senate employees.¹⁴⁶

By the 1950s, the architect of the Capitol and other officials insisted that no formal restrictions “with respect to color, race, or creed” existed in Capitol facilities, but de facto segregation persisted. When Christine McCreary joined Senator Stuart Symington's personal staff in 1953, she attempted to eat in a Senate cafeteria. An anxious hostess notified her that the cafeteria only served “people who work in the Senate,” so McCreary patiently explained that she worked for Symington. Reluctantly, the hostess allowed McCreary to take a seat. Diners gawked as McCreary passed through the serving line, tray in hand. “You could hear a pin drop,” she later recalled. Enduring the “snide remarks” of those who disapproved of her actions, McCreary refused to give up. “I went back [to that cafeteria] the next day, and the next day, until finally they got used to seeing me coming.” Although these men and women have gained



Christine McCreary. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

little attention from scholars, their stories inform an important chapter in a more complete and inclusive history of the Senate.¹⁴⁷

Smith vs. Cormier, 1960

“Smith vs. Cormier, 1960.” That sounds like a prize fight between two heavyweight boxing champions. Actually, it was a historic election between two contenders for a seat in the Senate. In one corner—the defending champion, Republican Margaret Chase Smith, popular senator from Maine. In the opposite corner—Democratic contender Lucia Cormier. For the first time in Senate history, both major party candidates were women.

First elected in 1948, Margaret Chase Smith had been reelected in 1954 and now sought a third term.

Political observers predicted an easy victory. They didn't know the Democrats were planning a surprise. Maine's junior senator, Democrat Edmund Muskie, had carefully chosen the opposing candidate—Democratic state representative Lucia Cormier. The Democrats' choice presented Smith with an interesting challenge. “I was so successful in overcoming the campaign argument that ‘the Senate is no place for a woman,’” Smith confessed, “that I must have overdone it.” Unlike Smith, Cormier was not nationally known, but she was a familiar face in Maine. A successful



Senator Margaret Chase Smith, left, and Lucia Cormier. *Maine's Senate Race*, by Boris Chaliapin, 1960. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, gift of Time magazine, © Chris Murphy.

businesswoman and veteran state representative, in 1959 Cormier had become Democratic floor leader in Maine's state house of representatives, the first woman to hold that post.¹⁴⁸

The historic contest gained national attention in February of 1960 when Senator Muskie personally launched Cormier's campaign. In a breach of Senate etiquette, Muskie escorted the Democratic candidate into the Senate Chamber and urged her to take a seat at one of the historic desks. A media ruckus followed as fascination with the unprecedented contest grew. Not surprisingly, press coverage smacked of sexism. Despite the accomplishments of both women, reporters frequently focused on their appearance and derided their qualifications. It was a contest of "Widow" versus "Spinster," declared the *Los*

Angeles Times. The *Christian Science Monitor* labeled Cormier as "a pert and plump former school teacher." Pundits portrayed Smith as a cranky shrew and predicted scenes of "hair-pulling" and "eye-scratching." A reporter for the *Washington Post* wrote that they expected to see "a dramatic clashing of will and words, a real fur-flying political cat fight," since the Democrats had "nominated a scrappy ex-school teacher . . . to topple [the Senate's] snowy-maned, frosty-mannered Republican 'queen bee.'" Even *Time* magazine, which gave the two candidates its cover story on September 5, 1960, and generally praised the efforts of both women, couldn't resist describing Cormier as a "stocky, even-tempered spinster."¹⁴⁹

Ignored by the press was the fact that Smith and Cormier had known each other for years, had worked together in the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, and were determined to run serious campaigns. "It was not easy to campaign against a friend," Smith recalled, "and the difficulty was intensified by the fact that we were running woman-against-woman. Both of us recognized that we had to guard against actions or developments that might reflect on women generally—on women in public office, women in politics." During the campaign, Smith remained mostly quiet to avoid any controversy that might give her challenger visibility. "Don't trade a record for a promise," she told voters. Two days before the November 8 election, the candidates faced off in a statewide televised debate. Commentators urged Cormier to "slug it out" with Smith, but both candidates remained above the fray. They were "ladylike," Smith recalled, but not "powder puff."¹⁵⁰

Smith won the so-called "Petticoat Race." She took 62 percent of the vote, the highest winning percentage of any Senate Republican that year. Consequently, in January of 1961, following this historic, high-profile matchup, the defending champion returned to the Senate stronger than ever.

Bipartisan Strategy Brings Success in 1964

In the spring of 1964, senators prepared to debate a landmark civil rights bill designed to ban racial discrimination in public facilities and establish equal employment opportunity as the law of the land. To push that debate forward, Democratic whip Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota and Republican whip Thomas Kuchel of California—floor managers for the bill—developed an effective bipartisan strategy to get the bill through a bitter debate, past cloture, and to final passage. A filibuster by southern segregationists was inevitable, but contrary to popular perception, Humphrey and Kuchel did not fear a filibuster. In fact, they welcomed it.¹⁵¹

President Lyndon B. Johnson and others encouraged Majority Leader Mike Mansfield to hold all-night sessions, if necessary, to exhaust the bill's opponents and force an end to any filibuster, but Mansfield, along with Humphrey and Kuchel, called for patience. They believed that an orderly and extended debate could convince reluctant senators to support the bill and would turn the tide of public opinion in their favor. "Every responsible Senator realizes the historic nature of this bill," Humphrey explained. "Every Senator knows its controversial nature. Every Senator knows that we bear great responsibilities to debate the legislation honestly, objectively, and fully."¹⁵²

The southern segregationists also prepared for debate and their strategy was clear: filibuster. Georgia's Richard Russell, leader of the Southern Caucus, rallied his forces to filibuster the bill for days, weeks, or months—as long as necessary to stop the bill. "We shall now begin to fight the war," Russell proclaimed as debate began in earnest. Filibusters had effectively killed or weakened every civil rights bill since the 1870s, and many predicted this would be a filibuster of unprecedented



Senators Thomas Kuchel, left, and Hubert Humphrey. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

scope. Humphrey and Kuchel had a tough job, but they tackled it with careful attention to detail.¹⁵³

As the final stage of debate got under way in March of 1964, the party whips convened bipartisan strategy sessions in Humphrey's leadership office. They assigned bipartisan teams—each with designated "captains"—to manage the bill's 11 sections. They distributed daily newsletters to refute in real time the arguments presented by the segregationists. They even formulated a strategy to combat procedural delaying tactics, assigning senators the responsibility of bringing small groups promptly to the Senate floor in response to quorum calls. For the first time in modern Senate history, the pro-civil rights forces were better organized than the opposition.¹⁵⁴

Humphrey and Kuchel, along with their allies, stressed the moral strength of their argument. "It is

difficult to fully comprehend the monstrous humiliations and inconveniences that racial discrimination imposes on [Black] citizens,” Humphrey explained. To make his point, he held up two travel guides. One identified hotels that allowed pets to stay overnight. The second listed hotels that allowed Black guests. “In Charleston, South Carolina,” he explained, “there are 10 places where a dog can stay, and none for a Negro.” Racial inequality could no longer be ignored, Kuchel added, “no matter from which State a Senator might come.”¹⁵⁵

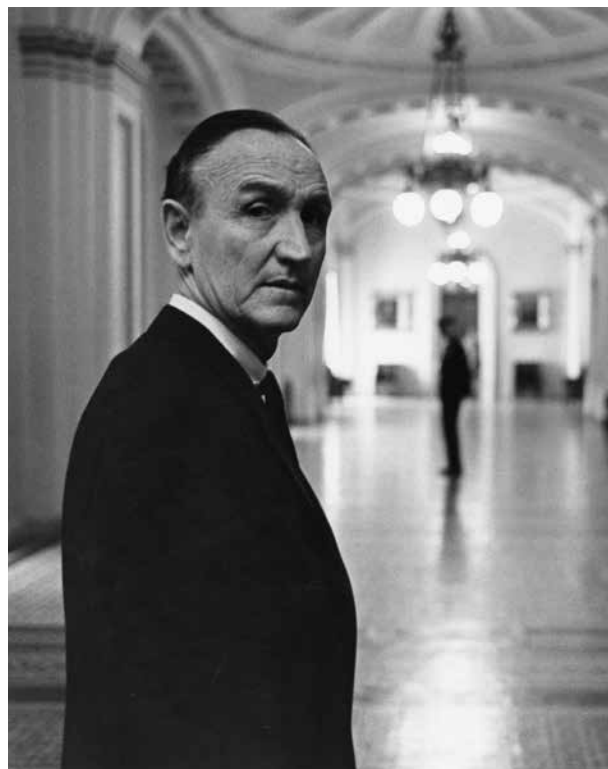
Week after week, the debate wore on—in the Senate Chamber and in the press. There were many long speeches from the segregationists, but the proponents of the civil rights bill used up more floor time than the

opposition. They staged spirited colloquies designed to explore every point of contention. Humphrey and Kuchel believed this lengthy debate would produce the votes needed to invoke cloture. By swaying public opinion in favor of the bill, they also provided cover for those senators who faced angry constituents at home.¹⁵⁶

From March 26 to June 10, 1964, the Senate debated the civil rights bill for a total of 60 days, including seven Saturday sessions. It is called a filibuster, but it was in reality 60 days of germane debate. At the end of that long debate, thanks in good part to the combined efforts of Humphrey and Kuchel, the Senate was prepared to take a historic vote on a landmark civil rights bill.¹⁵⁷

Invoking Cloture on the 1964 Civil Rights Act

Just before 10:00 on the morning of June 10, 1964, West Virginia senator Robert Byrd completed a speech that he had begun more than 14 hours earlier. The subject was the pending Civil Rights Act, a bill that had occupied the Senate since March as opponents staged a filibuster to block further action. As Senator Byrd finished his long speech—reporters called it the last gasp of the filibuster—the Chamber filled beyond capacity. Senators sat at their desks. Former senators, House members, and other guests—150 of them in all—squeezed into the limited standing space at the back of the Chamber. Visitors watched from the galleries. Outside the Capitol, queued among the news cameras and microphones, hundreds more gathered, hoping for a glimpse of the dramatic proceedings inside the Senate Chamber. It was a scene reminiscent of the Senate of the 19th century, when great orators like Daniel Webster drew large crowds to hear monumental debates.¹⁵⁸



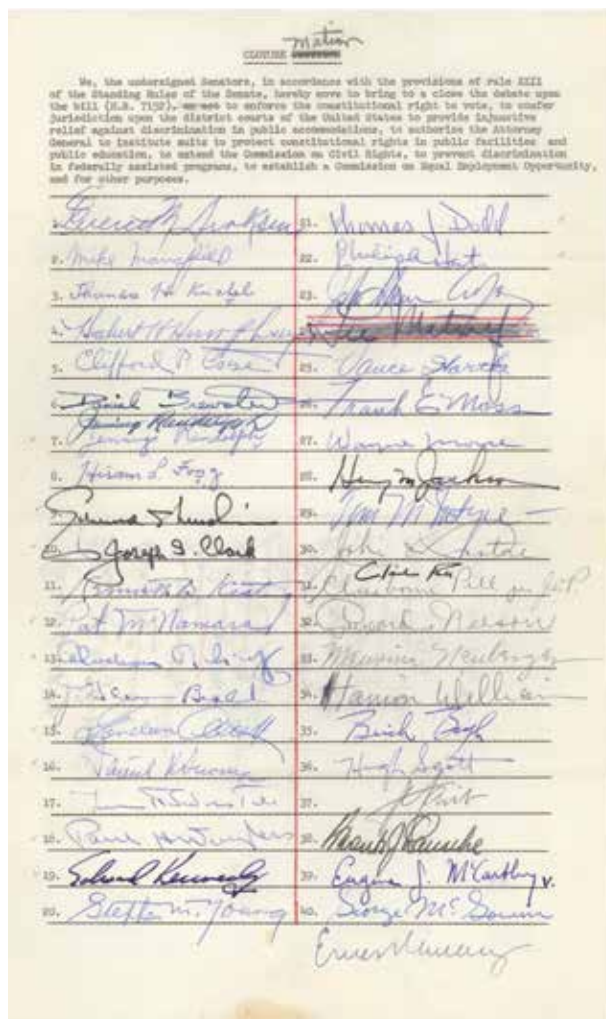
Senator Mike Mansfield. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

The 1964 Civil Rights Act would outlaw the practice of racial segregation in public facilities, ushering in a new era in national history. A version of this bill had first been proposed by Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner in 1870. Now, nearly a century later, a major civil rights bill was on the verge of passing its most difficult hurdle along the road to enactment—cloture. The majority whip, Minnesota senator Hubert Humphrey, believed he had secured the 67 votes required to invoke cloture, end the filibuster, and force a vote on the historic bill.¹⁵⁹

“Mr. President,” Majority Leader Mike Mansfield began, “the Senate now stands at the crossroads of history, and the time for decision is at hand.” Then, as a restless crowd filled every available space, Georgia senator Richard Russell, leader of the southern segregationists, voiced his final opposition. “Within the hour,” Russell declared, “the Senate will decide whether it will abandon its proud position as a forum of free debate by imposing cloture or gag rule upon its Members.” Russell recapped the major points of opposition. “I appeal to Senators to rise above the pressures to which they have been subjected,” he pleaded, “and to reject this legislation that will result in vast changes, not only in our social order, but in our very form of government.”

Humphrey countered. “In the Senate, the Constitution of the United States is on trial,” he declared. “The question is whether this Nation will be divided, or as we are taught in our . . . pledge of allegiance, one Nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” It was an emotional appeal from a crusader for equality. “I say to my colleagues of the Senate that perhaps in your lives you will be able to tell your children’s children that you were here for America to make the year 1964 our freedom year.”

Finally, Everett Dirksen—the Senate’s minority leader—took the floor. Briefly summarizing the final version of the bill that he had helped to craft,



Cloture motion to end debate on the Civil Rights Act of 1964, June 10, 1964. National Archives.

Dirksen spoke in support of the bill with his customary eloquence. “America grows. America changes,” he stated. “And on the civil rights issue we must rise with the occasion. That calls for cloture and for the enactment of a civil rights bill.” Noting that the day marked the 100th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln’s second presidential nomination, Dirksen proclaimed in words that echoed Victor Hugo, “Stronger than all the armies is an idea whose time has come. . . . It will not be stayed or denied. It is here!”¹⁶⁰

As the secretary of the Senate proceeded to call the roll, members and visitors alike listened with bated breath. Never in its history had the Senate

mustered enough votes to cut off a filibuster on a civil rights bill. Since 1917, when the cloture rule was first adopted, cloture had been successfully invoked only five times, and only once in the previous 30 years. The odds against gaining cloture on this civil rights bill were indeed daunting.

Mr. Aiken—aye. Mr. Allott—aye. Mr. Bible—no. And so the roll call began. When the clerk reached Mr. Engle, there was no response. Clair Engle was present in the Chamber, but a brain tumor had robbed the 52-year-old California senator of his ability to speak. Instead, the mortally ill Engle—in attendance despite doctors’ warnings—slowly lifted an unsteady hand and pointed to his eye, signifying his affirmative vote.

Few who witnessed this poignant gesture ever forgot it. Barely six weeks later, Engle was dead.¹⁶¹

Mr. Thurmond—no. Mr. Walters—no. Mr. Williams—aye. “That’s it,” exclaimed Mansfield. It was Delaware’s John Williams who provided the decisive 67th vote. With six wavering senators providing a four-vote margin of victory, the final tally stood at 71 to 29—27 Republicans and 44 Democrats joined forces to support cloture, opposed by the 6 Republicans and 23 Democrats who voted to block the bill.¹⁶²

After decades of civil rights crusades, the cloture vote took only 10 minutes, but as one reporter noted, those “were 10 minutes of high drama. Visitors in the jammed gallery sat on the edges of their seats,



Senators celebrate after successfully invoking cloture on the Civil Rights Act, June 10, 1964. (L-R) Warren Magnuson, Hubert Humphrey, Leverett Saltonstall, George Aiken, Mike Mansfield, Everett Dirksen, and Thomas Kuchel. Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library, University of Montana.

watching the solemn scene below.” Nine days later, in a vote that was by comparison anticlimactic, the Senate approved the Civil Rights Act with a vote of

73 to 27. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed it into law on July 2, 1964. Everett Dirksen was right. Its time had come.¹⁶³

Senator Hayden Votes No

The June 10, 1964, vote to invoke cloture on the Civil Rights Act was one of the most dramatic roll-call votes in Senate history. The debate over this bill, including a well-organized filibuster by southern segregationists, had occupied the Senate continuously from March until June. Finally, on that fateful June morning, the roll was called. Carl Hayden of Arizona, the Senate’s president pro tempore, voted no.¹⁶⁴

In 1912, just five days after Arizona gained statehood, Carl Hayden had become its first U.S. representative. He easily won election to the Senate in 1926, then served until 1969. Heeding early advice to be a work horse, not a show horse, Hayden rarely spoke in the Chamber, but his quiet influence became legendary. In 1962 Hayden became the first person to reach 50 years of service in Congress. By 1964 the 87-year-old “Dean of the Senate” was a veteran of many legislative battles, and throughout his long career he had adamantly opposed the procedure of invoking cloture on debate. Hayden viewed unlimited debate as his most valued procedural tool, and in his 38 years of Senate service, Hayden had never voted yes on a cloture motion. Now, he faced a dilemma.¹⁶⁵

On the morning of June 10, as Senator Robert Byrd delivered the final speech of a months-long filibuster, senators took their places at the Chamber’s historic desks. Outside the Capitol, CBS newsman Roger Mudd stood by to report on every detail of the Senate’s dramatic proceedings. For months, the Senate’s civil rights proponents had worked closely with



Senator Carl Hayden. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

Minority Leader Everett Dirksen to build a coalition to break the filibuster. Democrats hoped they could produce 42 votes from their 67-member caucus, leaving Dirksen to provide at least 25 from his pool of 33 Republicans. Among the Democratic senators lobbied hard for support was, of course, Carl Hayden.

The Arizona senator was not a segregationist, nor did he worry about the bill’s expansion of federal power. For Hayden, it was a matter of principle. Even when President Lyndon B. Johnson promised support for the Central Arizona Project, a water management plan that



CBS News correspondent Roger Mudd interviews Senator Thruston Morton during the debates on the Civil Rights Act of 1964. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

Hayden had nurtured for decades, the Arizona senator resisted. On the day of the cloture vote, with the bill's proponents still not certain of success, a contingency plan was needed in case one of the wavering senators turned against them. Carl Hayden became that contingency plan. Despite his lifelong opposition to cloture, Hayden at last agreed that he would vote yes—if, and only if, his vote was the deciding factor.¹⁶⁶

The roll call began. One by one, each senator answered the call. Every vote was crucial. When the roll call reached “Mr. Hayden,” there was no answer. Carl Hayden was waiting in the cloakroom. The roll call continued. Finally, when Senator John Williams of Delaware voted yes—becoming the 67th vote—cloture was invoked. Only then did Hayden emerge from the cloakroom. “It’s alright, Carl,” Majority Leader Mike Mansfield said quietly. “We’re in. We’ve got the votes.” Senator Hayden walked to the well of the Chamber, raised his hand, and voted no.¹⁶⁷

Dirksen’s Death Prompts Leadership Race

One of the Senate’s most respected leaders—Everett Dirksen of Illinois—died on September 7, 1969. A week earlier, Dirksen had undergone surgery to remove a malignant lung tumor. Complications set in, and on the 7th of September Dirksen’s heart stopped beating. Needless to say, the Republican leader’s death left quite a vacuum. Within hours, speculation focused on a successor. “The cast is big,” commented one observer, “the actors are skilled if a little inclined to bombast; the plot is seasoned with elements of intrigue, comedy, and suspense in a mystery drama [entitled] *After Dirksen, Who?*”¹⁶⁸

Dirksen had been Republican leader since 1959. For 10 years, Thomas Kuchel of California had served as his whip. When Kuchel lost his re-election bid in

1968, Dirksen backed his close friend and ally, the conservative Roman Hruska of Nebraska, for the whip position, but the Republican caucus chose the more liberal Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania. When Dirksen underwent surgery, therefore, it was Scott who became acting Republican leader. Many assumed that Dirksen’s death would result in an easy rise to leadership for Scott. It did not.¹⁶⁹

Dirksen’s untimely demise prompted a heated contest in a divided Republican caucus. The moderate-to-liberal wing of mostly eastern senators supported Hugh Scott. A second camp, consisting primarily of midwestern conservatives known as the Old Guard, favored Roman Hruska. Finally, there were the “Young Turks,” a group of moderate Republicans,



Everett McKinley Dirksen, by Richard Hood Harryman, 1984. U.S. Senate Collection.

many of them freshmen, who backed Howard Baker of Tennessee. “Scott will have [to] battle for it,” predicted one senator, as eulogies to Dirksen began filling the *Congressional Record*.¹⁷⁰

Howard Baker had the advantage of being Everett Dirksen’s son-in-law, and he quickly gained some powerful sponsors. “[It] is time for men with . . . fresher ideas to take over . . . the posts of leadership,” suggested Barry Goldwater of Arizona as he endorsed Baker. When Roman Hruska withdrew and threw his support to Baker, the race became a two-way contest between the 68-year-old Hugh Scott, who could boast of a congressional career dating back to 1941, and the 43-year-old Howard Baker, just two years into his Senate service. For two weeks, the Senate became a battleground as senators debated the relative strengths and weaknesses of the Elder Scott and the Young-Turk Baker. When rumors surfaced of a compromise that would give the



Senator Hugh Scott, left, with Senator Howard Baker. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

leadership to Scott and the whip position to Baker, the Tennessee senator denied any deal. “The people I am counting on are first-ballot votes for leader,” he insisted. “I am not running for whip.”¹⁷¹

On September 24, 1969, by a vote of 24 to 19, Republican senators elected a new leader. The winner was Hugh Scott. The Elder triumphed over the Upstart. Citing Baker’s lack of experience, a coalition of liberal and moderate Republicans joined senior conservatives to elect Scott. That afternoon, Baker hastily declared his candidacy for whip. Again, he lost. That victory went to Robert Griffin of Michigan. It took nearly a decade for Baker to gain his father-in-law’s coveted leadership post. When Hugh Scott retired in 1977, Baker finally became Republican leader. He squeaked in by the slimmest of margins—a single vote—but he went on to become one of the Senate’s ablest party floor leaders.¹⁷²

Female Pages Blaze a Trail

“What lurks in the clubby confines of the Senate Democratic cloakroom that a 15-year-old girl should not hear or see?” That rather provocative question was asked by the *Washington Post* in 1971. At the time, the Senate was engaged in a surprisingly ram-bunctious debate over an equally surprising and controversial issue—should girls be allowed to serve as Senate pages?¹⁷³

The Senate began hiring pages as early as the 1820s to run errands, deliver messages, and round up absent senators to answer quorum calls. Often, these young boys of 8 to 12 years old were related to a Senate officer or staff member. Some of them

were orphans or children of widowed mothers who needed the added income. In the 20th century, as the age requirement for pages was raised to 16 or 17, a school was established, a dormitory was built, and participants arrived from all around the country to enjoy this unique civics lesson. But, as late as 1971, every single page had been male.¹⁷⁴

In the 1960s, some senators began to challenge this boys-only tradition, forcing Sergeant at Arms Joseph Duke to defend the old practice. “While I know of no specific policy or rule which says there shall not be girl pages,” Duke wrote in a 1961 letter to senators, “I doubt . . . such an innovation would be considered . . . wise.” The type of work performed

by pages, Duke explained, requires “much walking, and even running at times.” In his opinion, such activity would “preclude the employment of teen-age girls.”¹⁷⁵

Finally, in 1970, three senators took a decisive step. Illinois senator Charles Percy raised the issue with his caucus. Could he appoint a female page? The caucus found no rule to prohibit such an appointment, so Percy issued a call for applications. Hundreds of young women responded, including 16-year-old Ellen Blakeman, who got the job. When Blakeman reported for duty, however, the new sergeant at arms, Robert Dunphy, refused to swear her in. Dunphy insisted that the Senate Rules Committee must issue a formal decree. Meanwhile, Senators Jacob Javits of New York and Fred Harris of Oklahoma also selected female pages—Paulette Desell and Julie Price. The pressure was on!¹⁷⁶



Senate pages Ellen Blakeman, center, and Paulette Desell with sponsoring senators Charles Percy, left, and Jacob Javits, 1971. U.S. Senate Historical Office.



Senate page Julie Price with her sponsor, Senator Fred Harris, right, 1971. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

The Rules Committee opened hearings on the matter on March 4, 1971, with Percy and Javits testifying. Chief among the panel's skeptics was Nevada senator Howard Cannon. If the Senate allowed for girl pages, Cannon wondered, what next? Would we have women "taking care of the Capitol grounds, and taking care of the plumbing, and things of that sort?" Rebutting such arguments, Percy and Javits reminded the panel of the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibited gender discrimination in the workplace. "Do we want to tell the American people that equality is sacred everywhere but on the Senate floor?"¹⁷⁷

Finally, on May 13, 1971, the Senate approved by voice vote Senate Resolution 112, stating that "no individual shall be denied appointment as a Page of the Senate solely on the basis of sex." The next day, Blakeman and Desell, followed by Price three days later, were sworn in as the Senate's first female pages. There will be "shuddering in the cloakrooms," predicted Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania. He was half right. Although the Republican cloakroom welcomed the young women, the Democratic cloakroom barred their entry for another six months. Which brings us back to that initial question—what were senators doing in that cloakroom?¹⁷⁸

The Senate Debates the Panama Canal Treaties

One of the most combative foreign policy debates in U.S. history ended in 1978 when the Senate approved the Panama Canal treaties. Gaining that consent was an impressive but daunting accomplishment. Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd, a Democrat from West Virginia, called it his “trial by fire” and readily acknowledged that success came only with the able assistance of the Republican leader, Tennessee’s Howard Baker.

The Senate had approved for ratification the original Panama Canal treaty in 1904, granting canal rights to the United States in exchange for financial support and military protection for Panama. Protests over control of the canal soon arose, however, and

remained persistent, prompting new treaties in 1936 and 1955. In 1964 riots erupted as Panamanians protested continued U.S. control. Negotiations carried on through each presidential administration. Finally, on September 7, 1977, President Jimmy Carter signed two treaties (a neutrality treaty and a canal treaty) to return control of the canal to Panama.¹⁷⁹

When the treaties arrived in the Senate for advice and consent, Senator Byrd quickly assessed their chances. “You’re not going to get a treaty without me,” he told President Carter, “and you’re not going to get a treaty without Senator Baker.” Senate opposition was strong, but even more vexing was the fact that the public fiercely opposed the treaties. While



Senate leaders Robert Byrd, left, and Howard Baker. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

some viewed control of the canal as a continuation of American imperialism and favored the treaties, most Americans feared that relinquishing control of the canal would weaken the United States' influence in international affairs. The Senate leaders understood that gaining votes from their colleagues required a shift in public opinion. "What you have to understand," Byrd explained, "is that any senator voting for these treaties will pay a high political price." A "badge of courage" could become "the dents in your armor." Howard Baker, whose initial reaction to the treaties was, "Why now, and why me?" had much at stake, including his reelection in 1978 and his presidential aspirations for 1980. Baker's support for the treaties was a political risk, but his collaborative work with Leader Byrd proved crucial to success.¹⁸⁰

When the Committee on Foreign Relations began hearings in the fall of 1977, the two leaders persuaded committee members, with some difficulty, to report the treaties to the floor without amendment. This strategy allowed Byrd and Baker to shape the debate with "leadership amendments" designed to settle disputes while providing senators with political cover. It was a delicate balancing act, but it paid off. The leadership amendments gained 76 co-sponsors. As formal debate began on February 8, 1978, Baker worried that media coverage would fail to explain the complicated details of the treaties to a still skeptical public. He

suggested gavel-to-gavel television coverage, but that idea was rejected by his colleagues. Instead, the two leaders compromised on radio coverage—the first-ever live broadcast of Senate floor debate.¹⁸¹

In March of 1978, the Senate passed the neutrality treaty, with one vote to spare, and began debate on the principal treaty. Scores of amendments and reservations were suggested, but the biggest road block came from Arizona senator Dennis DeConcini. He called for use of military force if necessary to keep the canal open. President Carter accepted the idea, but the Panamanian authorities rejected this ploy as a way to reintroduce perpetuity of U.S. control. Quickly, the two Senate leaders orchestrated a series of emergency meetings to produce more acceptable language.¹⁸²

Finally, on April 18, 1978, after nine long weeks of debate, the Senate approved the pivotal Panama Canal Treaty. Sixteen Republicans joined 52 Democrats to approve the treaty with 68 votes, just one vote more than the required two-thirds majority. That achievement was due, in good part, to the determined leadership of Robert Byrd, but even Senator Byrd attributed the success to Baker's skillful negotiations. "Without his support," Byrd insisted, "we could not have won approval of the Panama Canal treaties." Many years later, recalling the political tightrope of the debate, Byrd summed it up this way: "Courage? That's Howard Baker and the Panama Canal."¹⁸³



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¹²⁴ Lawrence J. Haas, *Harry and Arthur: Truman, Vandenberg, and the Partnership that Created the Free World* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016); Meijer, *Arthur Vandenberg*, 306.

¹²⁵ Ralph R. Roberts, compiler, *Platforms of the Two Great Political Parties, 1932 to 1948* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1950); quoted in *Congressional Record*, 80th Cong., 2nd sess., Appendix, A825. Vandenberg used the phrase repeatedly in the 1947–1948 time period. See Donald M. Snow and Patrick J. Haney, *U.S. Foreign Policy: Back to the Water's Edge* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 4–6. Similar language had been used by others before him, including Daniel Webster, who said in 1814, “Even our party divisions, acrimonious as they are, cease at the water's edge.” See Webster, *Works of Daniel Webster*, 1:25.

¹²⁶ Margaret Chase Smith, with William C. Lewis, Jr., ed., *Declaration of Conscience* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1972), includes a thorough description of Smith's speech against McCarthyism. Unless otherwise indicated, Smith quotations are from this source.

¹²⁷ “Purge State Department of Reds, Senator Urges,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 12, 1950, 8A; “McCarthy Attacks Acheson on Reds,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 1950, 11.

¹²⁸ Subcommittee on the Investigation of Loyalty of State Department Employees (“Tydings Committee”), authorized by S. Res. 231, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., February 2, 1950; *Congressional Record*, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., May 12, 1950, 6969.

¹²⁹ *Congressional Record*, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., June 1, 1950, 7894–95.

¹³⁰ “An Appeal for National Honesty and Decency,” *Hartford Courant*, June 2, 1950, 14; “McCarthy Hit in Senate,” *Boston Globe*, June 2, 1950, 1; “Ives Says Mrs. Smith Hit a Home Run on Senator McCarthy,” *Boston Globe*, June 4, 1950, C40; “GOP on McCarthy,” *New York Times*, June 4, 1950, E2; “Four Horsemen,” *Washington Post*, June 2, 1950, 20; “Seven GOP Senators Decry Smear Tactics of McCarthy,” *New York Times*, June 2, 1950, 1; “The Lady from Maine,” *Newsweek*, June 12, 1950; Larry Tye, *Demagogue: The Life and Long Shadow of Senator Joe McCarthy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2020), 182–83; Janann Sherman, *No Place for a Woman: A Life of Margaret Chase Smith* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 112.

¹³¹ Patricia Ward Wallace, *Politics of Conscience: A Biography of Margaret Chase Smith* (Westport: Praeger, 1995), 113, 117; Gregory Peter Gallant, *Hope and Fear in Margaret Chase Smith's America: A Continuous Tangle* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), 166.

¹³² Smith, *Declaration of Conscience*, 57–58. On censure resolution (S. Res. 301), see *Congressional Record*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., December 2, 1954, 16392.

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¹³⁴ "Senator's Son Convicted on Morals Charge," *Washington Post*, October 7, 1953, 11; "Senator Hunt Retiring," *New York Times*, June 9, 1954, 23.

¹³⁵ Drew Pearson, "What Killed Senator Hunt? The Untold, Tragic Story," *Detroit Free Press*, June 22, 1954, 16; Rick Ewig, "McCarthy Era Politics: The Ordeal of Senator Lester Hunt," *Annals of Wyoming* 55 (Spring 1983): 9–21.

¹³⁶ David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Richard M. Fried, *Men Against McCarthy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976); Rodger McDaniel, *Dying for Joe McCarthy's Sins: The Suicide of Wyoming Senator Lester Hunt* (Cody, WY: WordsWorth, 2013); Marquis Childs, "Smear by Political Rival Caused Senator Hunt's Suicide: Not an Isolated Episode... Threatens to Become a Pattern," *Boston Globe*, July 6, 1954, 12; Marquis Childs, "Smeared and Tears Plague the Senate," *Washington Post and Times Herald*, June 30, 1954, 12.

¹³⁷ A good summary of Watkins's rise to prominence is found in his entry in the *American National Biography*, s.v. "Watkins, Arthur Vivian (18 December 1886–01 September 1973)."

¹³⁸ S. Res. 301, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., July 30, 1954; Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *State Department Employee Loyalty Investigation*, S. Rep. 81-2108, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., July 20, 1950, 2.

¹³⁹ "Watkins Silences McCarthy, Climaxing Probe's First Day," *Boston Globe*, September 1, 1954, 8; "McCarthy Fails to Sway Probe," *Christian Science Monitor*, September 1, 1954, 1; "Watkins, McCarthy Clash As New Hearing Opens," *Washington Post*, September 1, 1954, 1; "Watkins v. McCarthy: Senate Drama Staged," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 10, 1954, 1; "McCarthy Hammers at Watkins as Senate Reconvenes," *Baltimore Sun*, November 9, 1954, 1.

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¹⁴² "Mrs. Roosevelt is 'Heroine of Convention,'" *Washington Post and Times Herald*, August 14, 1956, 29.

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¹⁴⁵ Drew Pearson, "Color Bar in Senate Restaurant," *Washington Post*, March 8, 1947, 9.

¹⁴⁶ Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, *Hearing on the Application of Louis R. Lautier for Admission to Senate Press Gallery and Hearing on Reports of Discrimination in Admission to Senate Restaurants and Cafeterias*, 80th Cong., 1st sess., March 18, 1947.

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CHAPTER 5

Senate Personalities



Humphrey Marshall Defies His Constituents

The inherent right of the people to instruct their elected representatives, as opposed to representatives acting according to their own judgment, has a long history. As our forefathers gathered in Philadelphia for the first Continental Congress in 1774, Irish philosopher Edmund Burke was framing this very debate. According to one school of thought, representatives were mere delegates of the people, expected to follow the wishes of their constituents. Burke argued instead for a trustee form of government. “Your representative owes you, not his industry only,” Burke stated, “but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.”¹



Senator Humphrey Marshall. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

This ongoing debate had particular relevance for the early Senate. While members of the House of Representatives were elected by popular vote, senators came to office through election by state legislatures. Not long after the Senate convened in 1789, state legislatures began submitting instructions to the new senators. In 1791, for example, the Virginia state legislature instructed its senators to support a proposal to open the Senate’s doors to the public. Without access to Senate proceedings, state legislators complained, how could they assess their senators’ actions?²

Such instructions often put senators in a difficult position. That certainly was the case for an early Kentucky senator named Humphrey Marshall. On October 24, 1795, the *Kentucky Gazette* printed a petition from Kentucky citizens to the state legislature. The petitioners criticized Marshall for voting in support of ratification of the controversial Jay Treaty with Great Britain. They called upon the state legislature to instruct Marshall to oppose the treaty. If he refused to do so, they further demanded that the state legislature agree to a constitutional amendment to allow for the recall of senators.³

When Marshall’s vote in favor of the treaty came under scrutiny, the Kentucky senator responded with his own article in the *Gazette*, which included this proclamation to his critics: “In considering the objections to this treaty, I am frequently ready to exclaim: Ah! Men of faction! Friends of anarchy! Enemies and willful perverters of the Federal Government! How noisy in clamor and abuse, how weak in reason and judgment appear all your arguments!” Marshall boldly insisted that he would do his duty, “according to my own judgment,” even if his action proved to be unpopular.⁴

Today, we may regard this as an expression of Burkean philosophy, but Marshall's constituents weren't particularly philosophical. When he returned home to Kentucky, an angry mob stoned his carriage in Frankfort, then dragged the recalcitrant senator

to the banks of the Kentucky River. The persuasive politician managed to talk the crowd out of its rash action and saved himself from a serious dunking. He survived the fury of his constituents, but only temporarily. Marshall lost his bid for reelection in 1800.⁵

Richard Johnson and the Proposal to Explore the Hollow Earth

Richard Johnson of Kentucky is probably best remembered as the only vice president ever elected by the Senate. In the election of 1836, Martin Van Buren won the presidency, but several electors refused to vote for his running mate, Richard Johnson, resulting in a tie for the vice presidency. In the case of a deadlock in Electoral College votes, the Twelfth Amendment to the Constitution requires the Senate to choose between the top two vice presidential candidates. The election therefore fell to the Senate, which put Johnson into office.⁶

Johnson was a controversial figure. Born to a prosperous landowner in a frontier outpost near Louisville, he shocked many by openly living with an enslaved woman and claiming paternity of their children. First elected to Congress in 1807, he gained fame during the War of 1812 for raising a regiment of Kentucky volunteers and reportedly killing the Native American Indian chief Tecumseh. He was elected to the Senate in 1819, where he became an expert on military affairs. His proudest legislative achievement was abolishing debtors' prisons in America. Through it all, he demonstrated a good-natured kindness that endeared him to both friend and foe. As one biographer noted, Johnson had "the rare quality of being personally liked by everyone." Such



Senator Richard Johnson. Library of Congress.

are the stories typically told about this Kentucky senator, but here is a lesser known story about this intriguing statesman.⁷

On March 7, 1822, Senator Johnson addressed his colleagues in the Senate Chamber. "I respectfully submit a petition to this learned body, that the U.S. Government finance an expedition to claim the lands

inside the Earth.” Puzzled, the elderly senator Rufus King of New York checked his hearing aid. “What did he say?” King asked, rapping his ear trumpet on the desk. “Dick Johnson wants us to finance a group of men to explore the center of the Earth,” loudly explained another senator. “That’s what I thought he said,” King replied. “I assumed there was dust in my hearing aid.”⁸

Johnson presented a proposal from army captain John Cleves Symmes, who theorized that the Earth was hollow. Inside were four concentric spheres, he suggested, each boasting a rich environment with human-like inhabitants. Symmes insisted he could reach this inner world through a large opening at the North Pole. Consequently, he issued a call for volunteers: “I ask [for] one hundred brave companions to start from Siberia . . . and with Reindeer and sleigh,” to cross “the ice of the frozen sea.” Upon reaching the inner world, Symmes predicted they would discover “a warm and rich land” stocked with animals, vegetables, and people.⁹

Captain Symmes found a kindred spirit in Richard Johnson, who asked the Senate to authorize the purchase of two 300-ton sailing vessels and to fund the would-be explorer’s “voyage of discovery” to the inner earth. It was suggested that this proposal be referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations. Nearly two dozen senators voted in favor of the proposal, but the motion still died. Johnson’s brother, Representative John Johnson, subsequently brought the request before the House, which considered sending it to the Commerce Committee—since such an expedition would establish trade routes with the “interior inhabitants”—but alas, that plan also failed.¹⁰

Sadly, Symmes died in 1829 without ever realizing his dreams of exploration, but his theory lived on in the imagination of writers like Jules Verne and Edgar Rice Burroughs. In 1837, despite this adventurous proposal, Richard Johnson went on to become the first and only vice president to be elected by the Senate. Perhaps more important, he remains the only senator ever to propose a journey to the center of the Earth.¹¹

Miss America Visits the Senate

Tuesday, January 29, 1839, began as an ordinary day on Capitol Hill. The Senate discussed Revolutionary War pensions. In the House of Representatives, a long-winded member held the floor while his colleagues passed the time by sleeping, whittling, or spitting tobacco. Into this mundane scene stepped a remarkable character, “a lady, luscious and eye-catching.” Taking a seat in the House gallery, the young beauty was accompanied by Old Man Eloquent himself—John Quincy Adams. All eyes turned to the gallery. Who was this woman?¹²

Her name was Helena Maria America Vespucci, a descendant of the 15th-century explorer Amerigo Vespucci, the Italian navigator who gave his name to a newly “discovered” continent. Hailed as “Miss America,” she was escorted to the finest homes in Washington, D.C., by the city’s most distinguished citizens. President Martin Van Buren welcomed her to the White House. Henry Clay bowed to her beauty. Daniel Webster hailed her with a grand party, serving his famous “Webster Punch,” a lethal mix of brandy, rum, champagne, lemon juice, and green tea notorious for leaving no man standing. She was such a



Amerigo Vespucci, artist unknown. Frederic Remington Art Museum, Ogdensburg, NY.

sensation that she reportedly made “Clay dizzy and Webster silly.”

Miss Vespucci came to the Capitol with a mission. When her visit brought her to the Senate Chamber, Missouri senator Thomas Hart Benton graciously gave her his seat and then pleaded her case. “Mr. President,” Benton cried, “Circumstances have thrown [this lady] upon our continent and brought her to solicit the aid of the Congress.” She fled the political turmoil of her native land to seek exile, he explained, and now she “asks for [citizenship and a] corner in that land which bears the name of her family.”¹³

A few days later, “Miss America” wowed the Senate Committee on Public Lands. This lady came as “a stranger, without a country and without a home,” noted the committee’s report. “[She] is indeed worthy

of the name of America.” Unfortunately, it was not within the committee’s power to grant her request for land. However, “What this Government cannot do,” insisted the committee, “is within the power of the American people.” Immediately, the Senate sergeant at arms, Stephen Haight, launched an appeal for funds. Webster and Adams were among the first to donate, followed by a notable list of senators, representatives, Supreme Court justices, government clerks, and even page boys. Weeks passed and the pledges piled up. It was a wonderful display of American compassion and generosity.¹⁴

There was just one small problem. Maria Vespucci was a fraud, “an adventuress” looking for new opportunities. Hearing of her exploits, the French court dis-

patched a messenger to Washington. She was not the scion of an illustrious Italian family, reported a French official, but rather a member of an “old, old profession” in France. Once the courtesan of the King’s son, she had been paid to leave the country. Was she descended from Amerigo Vespucci? Maybe, the official suggested, or maybe not. “Fashionable Washington stood aghast,” wrote one historian, “shocked into silence.”¹⁵

As news of the deception reached the Senate Chamber, the usually verbose statesmen were too stunned to speak. Sitting at his desk, the great Dan Webster bowed his head in dismay while others wept. At least one observer saw the humor in the situation. “It would have been a rare joke,” commented a reporter, “if Congress had . . . granted that ‘corner of land.’”¹⁶

Arthur Gorman and the Washington Senators

The 1955 Broadway musical “Damn Yankees” featured a baseball fan named Joe who was so loyal to his hometown baseball team, the Washington Senators, that he was willing to compromise with the devil to beat those “damn Yankees” and enjoy a winning season. Just “one long ball hitter,” Joe cried in despair. “I’d sell my soul for one long ball hitter!” Poof! A cloud of smoke. A stranger appears. “Would you like to be the greatest ballplayer in all history?” asked the mysterious man. We know what happened next.

At one time, Washington baseball fans didn’t need help from the devil. They had Arthur Gorman. Born in Woodstock, Maryland, in 1839, Gorman became a Senate page at the age of 12, then served as messenger, doorkeeper, and postmaster. Throughout his Senate employment, Gorman’s evenings and weekends were devoted to baseball. He even used his political connections to acquire space for ball diamonds near the Capitol and on the White House grounds.¹⁷

In 1859, with a growing reputation as both player and promoter, the 20-year-old Gorman became a founder of the Washington Nationals Base Ball Club. The first recorded game in D.C. took place on May 5, 1860. Games continued through the Civil War years, culminating in a grand tournament in 1865, carefully orchestrated by Gorman. After the war, Gorman was named president of the National Association of Base Ball Players, a position that gave him great influence over the development of the national pastime. Under his direction, the leagues expanded and gained professional status, but his influence had negative consequences as well. Gorman led the way in establishing and maintaining strict racial segregation in the professional leagues, a policy that



Senator Arthur Gorman. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

endured for decades. In the 1870s, Gorman’s interests turned to politics. After serving in Maryland state government, he came to the Senate in 1881 and served nearly four terms—but he never stopped promoting baseball.¹⁸

As Gorman’s political career advanced, however, Washington’s baseball prospects stumbled. A series of teams appeared and disappeared in the post-war years. In 1891 the Washington Statesmen joined the National League and then, in tribute to Arthur Gorman, changed the name to the Washington Senators. Unfortunately, the National League dumped several teams in 1899, including the Senators. When the American League was founded in 1901, Washington again got a team, again named the Senators. In

1905 new team owners changed the name to the Nationals, but for the next half century the team was popularly known as the Senators—an indication of Gorman’s enduring legacy.

The Washington Senators enjoyed a brief success in the 1920s. With the help of great players like Bucky Harris and Walter Johnson, they beat the Yankees in 1924 to take the league pennant, then defeated the New York Giants to win the World Series. But that was an aberration. Year after year, the Senators were a laughingly bad team, prompting famed sportswriter Charley Dryden to joke: “Washington—First in war, first in peace, and last in the American League.” By the 1950s, no one was surprised when a

hit Broadway musical featured a Senators fan as its desperate deal-maker.¹⁹

Washington lost the team in 1960. It moved to Minnesota and became the Twins. A new expansion team, also called the Senators, left in 1971. Finally, in 2005, Washington, D.C., got a new team, but it did not adopt the “Senators” label. Perhaps the team chose “Nationals” in an effort to distance it from the Senators’ sorry record. Some suggested they were just returning to the old team’s official name. There is another explanation. They didn’t know their history. They had forgotten that baseball in Washington, D.C., owed a great debt—not to the devil, but to a United States senator named Arthur Gorman.²⁰



Washington Nationals, popularly known as the Senators, 1924. Library of Congress.

Three Brothers Compete for One Senate Seat

The 1871 election of a U.S. senator from Delaware remains quite unique in Senate history. That year, Senator Willard Saulsbury, Sr., of Delaware sought reelection to a seat he had occupied since 1859. With two Senate terms behind him, Saulsbury was quite confident that he could easily gain the 16-vote majority he needed from the 30-member state legislature, but—to his surprise—two serious competitors challenged him for the seat.

Willard Saulsbury began his Senate career in 1859 as a “copperhead” (or “peace Democrat”), someone who resisted secession and opposed war while maintaining opposition to the abolition of slavery. Believing that the Union could be saved through peaceful means, he proposed a “Central Confederacy” of states that excluded the extreme proslavery states

of the South as well as the radical antislavery states of the North. His proposal was ignored.²¹

Soon after taking office, Saulsbury began having “political difficulties,” often due to a combination of his combustible personality and his fondness for alcohol. In 1863, for example, as the Senate debated a bill to criticize President Abraham Lincoln’s suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, Saulsbury accused Lincoln of being a “weak and imbecile” man. “If I wanted to paint a despot,” he proclaimed, “I would paint the hideous form of Abraham Lincoln.” Vice President Hannibal Hamlin, presiding over the Senate, called Saulsbury out of order and demanded that he take his seat, but the Delaware senator refused. When Hamlin directed the sergeant at arms to “take the senator in charge,” Saulsbury drew a pistol. “Let him do so at his expense,” he cried and threatened to shoot the officer. Days later, facing a resolution of expulsion, Saulsbury apologized. The Senate considered expelling him again in 1867 when he repeatedly appeared in the Chamber intoxicated, but Saulsbury managed to escape disciplinary action.²²

Not surprisingly, by 1871 members of the Delaware state legislature had grown concerned about Saulsbury’s erratic behavior. As his reelection drew near, party leaders discretely approached another possible candidate—the senator’s elder brother, Gove Saulsbury. A physician and outgoing governor of Delaware, the ambitious Gove readily agreed to challenge his younger brother. Willard cried foul and charged Gove with betrayal, vowing to stop at nothing to defeat him. Thus the two brothers—Willard and Gove—became fierce competitors for the Senate seat. As if that wasn’t complicated enough,

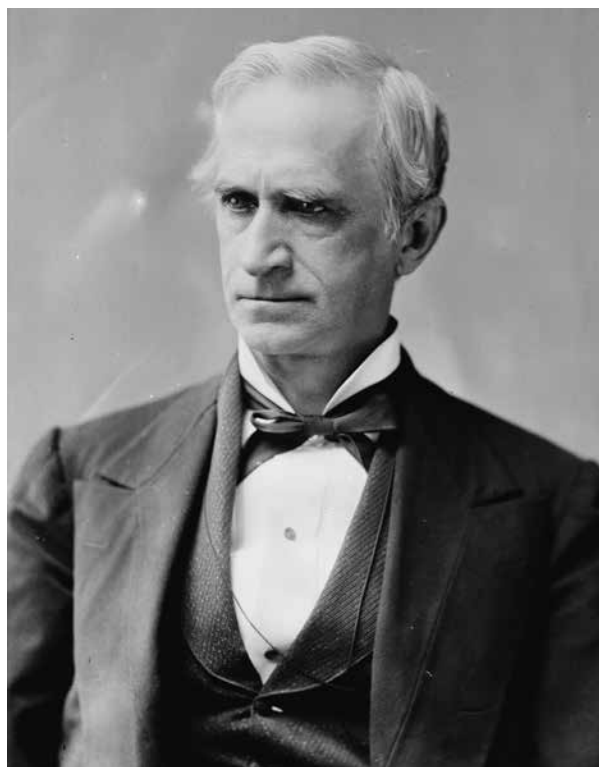


Senator Willard Saulsbury, Sr. Library of Congress.

when state legislators prepared to vote on January 17, 1871, a third, surprise candidate appeared—Eli Saulsbury, the third brother. Three brothers—one Senate seat.

On the first two ballots, the incumbent Willard drew 13 votes, but Gove got 14 with Eli trailing far behind. On the third ballot, Gove held the lead with 15, followed by Willard at 14, leaving just a single vote for Eli. As the fourth ballot began, knowing that Gove was just one vote away from a majority, a bitter Willard released his supporters and backed brother Eli as a compromise candidate. Eli Saulsbury won the election.²³

Unlike his very competitive brothers, Eli was not a fiery orator nor a partisan crusader. “He was a quiet plodder,” stated a reporter, “a lawyer by profession, and a man who was plain and unassuming.” He was also a dedicated teetotaler. Eli Saulsbury remained in office for the next 18 years.



Senator Eli Saulsbury. Library of Congress.

Sing a Song of Shotgun

In 1879 one senator made headlines by chasing another senator down the street with a shotgun. The man wielding the shotgun was Rhode Island senator William Sprague, by this time out of office, and the unlucky victim of the hunt was one of the most famous senators of the Gilded Age, Roscoe Conkling of New York.

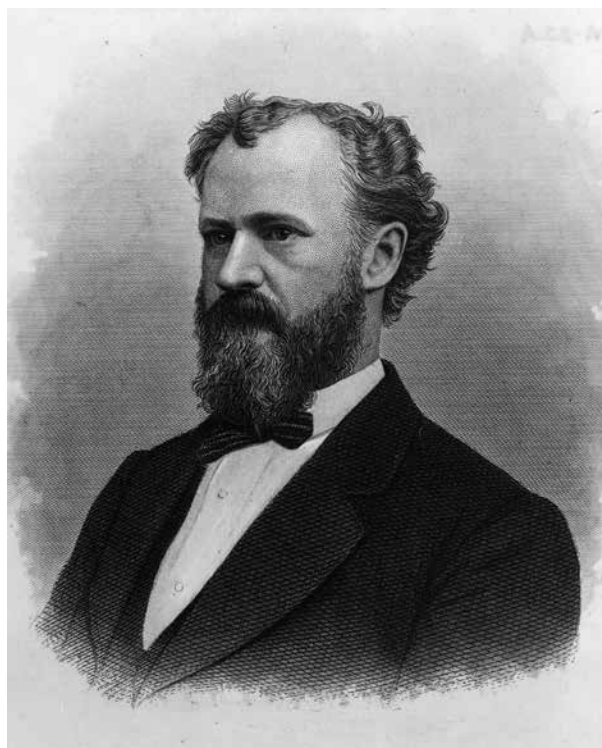
William Sprague was a wealthy textile manufacturer who had enjoyed a quick rise through political ranks to become Rhode Island’s governor in 1860 and then senator in 1863, all by the age of 33. Soon after arriving in Washington, the young senator met and married Kate Chase, the beautiful daughter of Treasury Secretary (and later chief justice) Salmon Chase.

Kate Chase was quite a catch! Coming to Washington in 1860, she lavishly spent her father’s considerable fortune on fancy parties and elegant soirees. When she married Sprague in 1863, their extravagant wedding was the highlight of the social season. Symbolic of this union of wealth was Sprague’s wedding gift to his bride—a luminous tiara of matched pearls and diamonds that cost thousands of dollars.²⁴

For a while, all looked pretty rosy for the Spragues. Kate gave birth to four children and William’s Senate career flourished, but by the early 1870s the marriage was falling on hard times. There were rumors about Sprague’s drinking and carousing. Whispers about Kate’s infidelities even questioned whether Sprague



Senator William Sprague and Kate Chase Sprague. National Archives.



Senator Roscoe Conkling. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

was the father of her youngest child. The couple's careless spending also put strains on the family's wealth, and when that fortune took an even bigger hit from the economic panic of 1873, the marriage collapsed.²⁵

That brings us to New York senator Roscoe Conkling. Brilliant, handsome, ambitious, and arrogant, Roscoe Conkling was one of the most powerful and flamboyant figures of the era. He had a penchant for green trousers, scarlet coats, and yellow shoes. He was, as one historian wrote, "a veritable bird of paradise amidst a [Senate] barnyard of drabber fowl." And by the 1870s, Conkling was reaching the heights of his political power. In fact, few senators of the era could match his status and elegance, and this is probably what caught Kate's eye. Their torrid affair became the focus of Washington gossip.²⁶

On a pleasant day in August of 1879, Kate was vacationing in Narragansett Pier, Rhode Island, at her stately, but soon to be auctioned off, summer home. William Sprague, whose Senate term had ended in 1875,

surprised his wife with an unexpected visit, and he found not only Kate but also Senator Conkling. Angry and humiliated—and reportedly drunk—Sprague grabbed his shotgun and threatened to shoot Conkling if he didn't leave the house. Conkling took off, but the drama continued. Crazy and erratic and waving his loaded shotgun in the air, Sprague chased the New York senator through the streets of the summer resort.²⁷

It was a sorry spectacle that forever tainted the reputations of both senators as well as Kate Chase Sprague. Needless to say, the press had a field day with the salacious details, all of which were repeated when the couple subsequently divorced. One newspaper reporter even composed this little jingle to sum up the sordid tale:

*Sing a song of Shot Gun / Belly full of rye
Two loyal Senators / Making mud pie.
When the pie was opened / The public got a smell.
And Sprague said to Conkling / "Now you go to"—
Well, the ending speaks for itself.²⁸*

Mark Twain Takes on Congress

One day in 1867, Senator William Stewart of Nevada was startled by a visitor. A “very disreputable-looking person slouched into the room,” Stewart recalled, dressed “in a seedy suit” with “scraggy black hair leak[ing] out of a battered old slouch hat . . . [and] an evil-smelling cigar . . . protrude[ing] from the corner of his mouth.” He had “a very sinister appearance.” When Stewart recognized the man as a reporter who had penned unflattering articles about him, the senator proclaimed: “If you put anything in the paper about me, I’ll sue you for libel.” The visitor was Samuel Clemens, better known as Mark Twain.²⁹



Mark Twain, center, as a Washington journalist. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

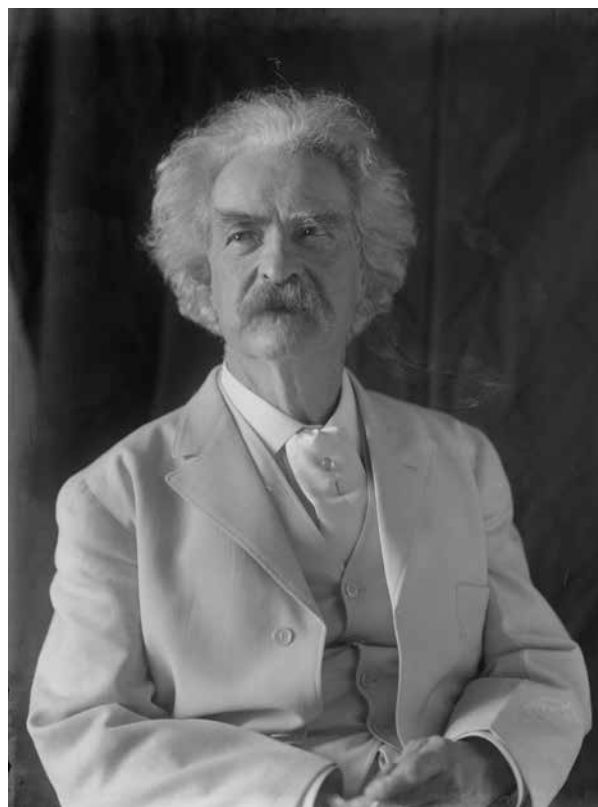
Newly arrived in Washington, Twain was seeking an easy job with suitable income to subsidize his blossoming writing career. Senators had little staff at the time, so hiring reporters as clerks for the short legislative sessions often proved beneficial to both parties. Twain’s shabby appearance must have stirred up sympathy because Stewart agreed to hire him, but Twain’s Senate career didn’t last long. “During the whole time that I was connected with the Government,” Twain recalled, “it seemed as if I could not do anything . . . without getting myself into trouble.”

Certainly, Mark Twain proved to be less than a model employee. He often forged the senator’s frank on personal letters and once rejected a report from the Treasury Department simply because it was too boring. “[T]here were no descriptive passages,” he complained, “no poetry, no sentiment—no heroes, no plot, no pictures—not even wood-cuts.” He arrived late, departed early, and accomplished very little. When confronted by a frustrated Senator Stewart, Twain retorted: “Sir, do you suppose that I am going to *work* for six dollars a day?”³⁰

Most annoying of all, Twain answered Stewart’s constituent mail with reckless abandon. When one group requested the establishment of a post office in their Nevada mining camp, for example, Twain replied: “What the mischief do . . . you want with a post office . . . ? If any letters came there, you couldn’t read them. . . . No, don’t bother about a post office. . . . What you want is a nice jail.” Distraught, Stewart lamented, “I am a ruined man” and ordered Twain to leave. “I regarded that as a sort of covert intimation that my service could be dispensed with,” Twain commented. “I never will be a private secretary to a senator again. You can’t please that kind of people.”³¹

That was not the last encounter between Mark Twain and the Senate. Four decades later, in December of 1906, the by-then-famous author returned to Capitol Hill to testify before a joint committee on the issue of copyright laws. Since publication of his first book in 1869, the 71-year-old Twain had lost a small fortune to outright piracy of his novels. At the time, an author held copyright for a limited number of years with a slim possibility for renewal, so many of Twain's earlier works, including *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, were already in danger. Twain called for a copyright restriction that lasted through the life of the author plus 50 years. "I think that will satisfy any reasonable author," he explained to the committee, "because it will take care of his children." And then he added, "Let the grandchildren take care of themselves."³²

Mark Twain didn't win his copyright battle that day—it took Congress another 70 years to catch up with his proposal—but Twain's testimony before the joint committee did mark an important point in his illustrious career. On that day in 1906, Mark Twain appeared in what became his trademark costume—a three-piece white suit accompanied by the ever-present cigar. "In spite of the keen December wind blowing outside," noted the *Washington Post*, Twain "burst into view, garbed in cream-colored suit of light summer flannel." When asked about his white suit, Twain remarked that it was his uniform. "It is



Mark Twain. Library of Congress.

the uniform of the American Association of Purity and Perfection, of which I am the president, secretary, and treasurer, and the only man in the United States eligible to membership." Such a garment, he noted, indicated the purity of his lobbying efforts. No longer that scruffy job-seeking reporter of sinister appearance, Twain now spoke to senators as a fully established and properly attired American icon.³³

The Sons of the Wild Jackass

Political factions and parties have gained some curious labels through the years—often given to them by their opposition. There was the Nullifier Party of the 1830s and the barnburner faction of the 1840s. We had copperheads in the Civil

War, mugwumps in the Gilded Age, and goo-goos in the Progressive Era. The Republican recusants saved President Andrew Johnson from removal from office in 1868. The irreconcilables opposed President Woodrow Wilson's efforts to join a League of



Senator George Moses. Library of Congress.

Nations in 1919. One of the most original political nicknames dates to 1929, when New Hampshire senator George Moses referred to a group of western progressives as the “Sons of the Wild Jackass.”

At the time, the Senate was embroiled in a prolonged debate over the Smoot-Hawley protective tariff, which pitted senators from eastern manufacturing states, sometimes called the regular Republicans, against progressive Republicans from midwestern and western agrarian states. Into this volatile situation stepped George Moses—the Senate’s witty but caustic president pro tempore. On November 7, 1929, Moses addressed a group of New England manufacturers and voiced his frustration with the independent-minded progressives. “The sons of the wild jackass now control the Senate,” he

complained, accusing the western senators of undermining the efforts of old guard Republicans like himself. By the next day, his comment was headline news in cities across the nation.³⁴

Moses’s denunciation of his progressive colleagues further inflamed a long-standing rift between the eastern political establishment and the western insurgency. Although Moses tried to defuse the situation by suggesting his remark had been a biblical allusion that actually complimented the senators for their stubborn behavior, his attack on the westerners helped to unify a loose coalition of progressives into a potent political force. “Mr. Moses has inspired in the Progressives . . . an even more mulish spirit than they possessed in the past,” noted one contemporary. “He has imbued them with a donkey-like desire to bear the responsibilities as well as the burdens of the worthy beast to which he likened them.”³⁵

Just who were these “wild jackassians” who so infuriated Moses? Leading the pack, or should we call it a herd, was George Norris of Nebraska, soon to be known as the father of the Tennessee Valley Authority. There was William Borah of Idaho, who would become a leading isolationist of the 1930s. The group boasted a few young upstarts, too, like Gerald Nye of North Dakota, whose 1934 investigation of



Senator Gerald Nye. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

the munitions industry would help to fuel the neutrality acts of the late 1930s.

The influence of the Sons of the Wild Jackass reached its peak in the mid-1930s and then died by the end of that decade, leaving Regular Republicans like Robert Taft and Arthur Vandenberg to carry

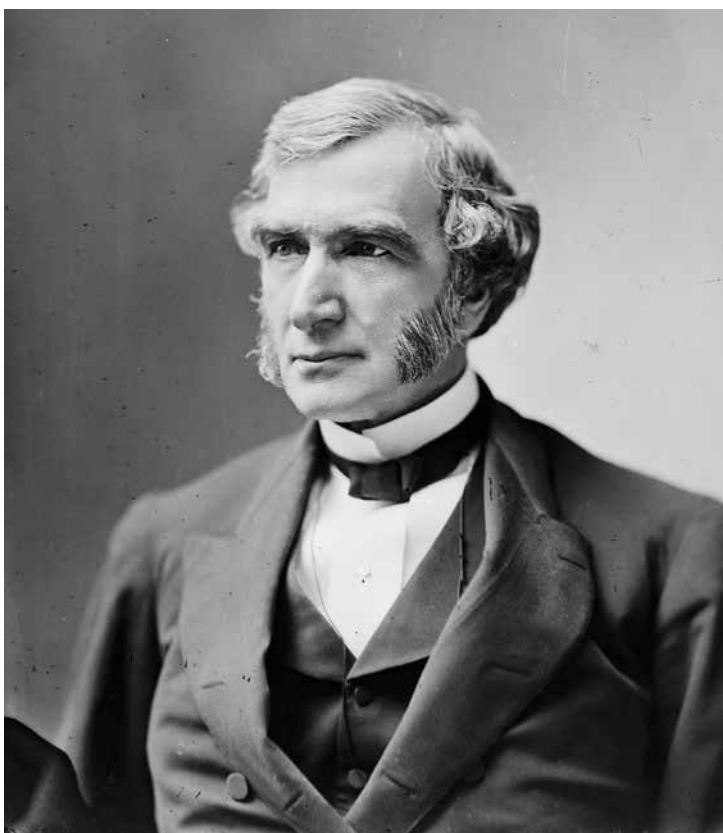
the party's work into the 1940s. And what of George Moses? His 15-year Senate career came to an end with the 1932 election, but by then he had already left his mark on Senate history. To this day, the New Hampshire senator is remembered by his own playful nickname—Mule-skinner Moses.³⁶

Baby Duvall Milks the Senate

“Dear Sir,” the letter began, “Inclosed you will find the baptismal certificate of my little son, Justin Morrill Duvall, whom I named in honor of you.” No doubt this letter—dated December 1890 and signed William Duvall—kindled the curiosity of Vermont senator Justin Morrill. Duvall explained in the letter that he wanted to name his son for a prominent member of the Senate. “I have seen you on several occasions,” he wrote, “and always have been an admirer.” As he continued reading, Senator Morrill was probably feeling pretty good about himself. It’s not every day that someone names his son after you. Little Justin “is getting along first rate,” the proud father reported, “and I hope that he may live and be as upright and honest as the man after whom he is named . . . and as soon as we have his picture taken I will send you one.”

Justin Morrill had been in Congress for 35 years and in the Senate since 1867. By 1890 the 80-year-old senator was one of the Senate’s most respected elder statesmen. Mr. Duvall’s kind letter must have been a tonic to the old gentleman, and Morrill probably read the next paragraph

with even greater interest. “Also inclosed you will find five tickets to an entertainment which is given for my benefit,” Duvall explained. “I would not have troubled you with them, only last week I had my leg broke while at work, and my friends are giving this for my benefit.” Duvall asked the senator to kindly



Senator Justin Morrill. Library of Congress.

send \$1 for each of the five tickets, then closed with his best wishes for the holidays. Senator Morrill promptly pulled out a nice, crisp five-dollar bill and mailed it to Duvall's address in Baltimore.³⁷

A few days later, a letter arrived for Senator Charles Manderson of Nebraska, at that time the Senate's president pro tempore. "Dear Sir," it read, "Inclosed you will find the baptismal certificate of my little son, Charles Manderson Duvall, whom I named in honor of you." After reading the letter, Manderson also reached for his wallet, then hesitated. Something about this letter and the enclosed birth certificate seemed familiar. Hadn't he seen a similar certificate in Senator Morrill's office? If Mrs. Duvall could be the mother of two infant sons, he wondered, might she have given birth to a few more at the same time? Manderson began to investigate, and soon the truth was revealed.

At least 25, perhaps more, of the Senate's 90 members had received such a letter, and most had fallen for Duvall's scheme. Not only did these proud senators mail their \$5 to the Baltimore address, many also purchased gifts for the little namesake. "Grave and reverend Senators—to some of whom the delights of early fatherhood were but memories—sent out and purchased silver mugs and silver spoons, and had names engraved thereon," reported the *New York Times*. "Others folded up samples of the newest and most crisp five or ten dollar bills. All of them wrote nice little letters" to the boy. The vice president also fell victim to the fraud. There is now a "Levi Morton Duvall," reported the *New York Times*, who is the proud owner of "a nice silver cup, appropriately inscribed." Duvall's sons—at least 25 of them—were doing pretty well.³⁸

As news of Duvall's con game spread, most found it quite amusing. "The whole city is laughing tonight over a story . . . of how a smart confidence man in Baltimore has been victimizing grave and dignified United States Senators," explained the *Los Angeles*

DUVALL'S BABIES.

A BALTIMORE CONFIDENCE
MAN'S UNIQUE SCHEME.

He Names a Mythical First-born
Son After About Twenty Sen-
ators and Reaps a Rich
Harvest of Presents.

Los Angeles Times headline, December 23, 1890.

Times. Even the senators found it entertaining—particularly those who had not been targeted by Duvall. The laughter "was frequent and painful and free" in the Senate today, a reporter quipped. "To-day there is more of humor than of seriousness in the Senate," reported another, with speeches "interrupted by smiles" and complaints "sandwiched between robust strata of never-wearying laughter." The laughter also spread to the House of Representatives, where members insisted they would never have been taken in by Duvall's swindle. "Oh, no," cried one representative, "Mr. Duvall knows his business. He seems pretty well acquainted with Congress and knew where the ground lay fallow. Did not the good book say, 'The mighty shall be laid low.'"

One person did take it seriously. Massachusetts senator George Hoar called in the Baltimore police, who tracked down William Duvall, a down-on-his-luck former mail carrier who had an estranged wife but no son and no broken leg. To cover his tracks, Duvall had been using the addresses of two Baltimore saloons to rake in the loot. The *Times* predicted rather facetiously "that proceedings will be instituted against Mr. Duvall, notwithstanding the great size of his family." And they were. Mr. Duvall got three years in prison for his senatorial con job. No word on who got the silver cups!³⁹

Mark Hanna and the Presidential Election of 1896

Marcus Hanna was born in New Lisbon, Ohio, on September 24, 1837. At age 15, he moved to Cleveland, where his father established a grocery business. By age 25, Hanna ran that business. He married the daughter of a wealthy coal magnate, and before long he controlled that enterprise, too. Eventually, Hanna's business empire included coal, iron, steel, and railroads. He also owned the *Cleveland Herald* and the Cleveland Opera House and ran the city's streetcar system. Clearly, Hanna had a knack for business. As it turned out, he also had a knack for politics.⁴⁰

By the 1870s, Hanna had become active in national politics, using his growing wealth to bolster the presidential campaigns of several Ohio candidates, including Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876 and James Garfield in 1880. With each election, Hanna's influence grew, but his true political genius emerged in 1896 when he managed the presidential campaign of Ohio governor William McKinley. To get McKinley nominated, Hanna used every means possible to sway delegates. He gained the support of southerners, for example, by promising them the rewards of patronage. He pledged to eastern delegates strong support for a gold-standard currency. This tactic put Hanna's candidate at odds with Silver Republicans in western states, but it shored up the winning coalition that got McKinley nominated on the very first ballot. Hanna's coalition building became legend, and the press dubbed him the "Great Apostle of Harmony."⁴¹

The cunning, well-funded campaign that followed set a new standard in presidential politics. While Democratic nominee William Jennings Bryan roamed the country delivering "cross of gold"

speeches, William McKinley sat on his front porch, welcoming trainloads of voters who traveled to Ohio to meet the presidential candidate. This "front porch campaign" wasn't a novel idea, but Hanna pushed it to new heights. He reinvented the front porch campaign, noted one historian, "to play to McKinley and the organizations' strength." The McKinley home became a tourist attraction. Hanna "got the help of the railroads to bring the people to McKinley. . . . Daily parades and picnics were prepared for train arrivals. Vendors lined the streets selling food and souvenirs." (Theodore Roosevelt complained that Hanna promoted McKinley like a "patent medicine.") The campaign proved victorious on November 3, 1896,



"Dollar Mark Hanna," by Homer Davenport, January 4, 1900. Library of Congress.

putting McKinley in the White House and turning Hanna into a national symbol of political power mocked by cartoonists as “Dollar Mark.”⁴²

President McKinley offered Mark Hanna a cabinet post, but Hanna declined. “Me in the Cabinet?” he responded. The “newspapers would have cartoons of me selling the White House kitchen stove!” Instead, Hanna took a seat in the Senate. At first, other senators were suspicious of this unusually high-profile freshman who served as the president’s closest advisor, but unlike the ruthless operator depicted in the press, they found Hanna to be smart, generous, and congenial. As senator, he focused on issues of commerce, played a key role in business-labor arbitration, and became such a strong supporter of the proposed Central American canal that senators nicknamed it the “Hannama Canal.”⁴³

In 1900 Hanna chaired McKinley’s successful reelection campaign, but he was no fan of the vice presidential nominee, Theodore Roosevelt. “[T]here’s only one life,” Hanna warned, “between that madman and the Presidency.” Within a year, McKinley was dead—assassinated—and “the madman” was in charge. Hanna publicly supported Roosevelt, while he quietly sought another candidate for 1904, but he never got the chance to run another campaign. The 67-year-old Mark Hanna died of typhoid fever on February 15, 1904. Yet, even after his death, Hanna dominated the 1904 convention. As Theodore Roosevelt accepted the presidential nomination, hanging behind him on the rostrum was a colossal portrait of Mark Hanna—political operative, presidential kingmaker, and the junior senator from Ohio.⁴⁴

Will Senate Tradition Be Snubbed?

Senators, reporters, and visitors in the gallery anxiously waited. Would the Senate witness a conspicuous clash of personalities? Wisconsin’s progressive governor Robert La Follette had won election to the U.S. Senate. As he prepared to take office in 1906, gossip and speculation ruled the day. Would Wisconsin’s senior senator, the powerful Republican operator John Spooner, respect tradition and escort his new colleague to the well of the Senate Chamber to take the oath, or would the long-standing political feud between the two men prompt Spooner to snub La Follette? Would La Follette snub Spooner? No one knew!

John Spooner had joined the Senate in 1885, served two separated terms, and became one of its most influential members. Known to his contemporaries

as “the debater,” Spooner was a product of Gilded Age boss politics. He was a skilled orator, a shrewd parliamentarian, and a constitutional expert who became a member of the “Senate Four,” an influential group of senators that ruled the Senate around the turn of the 20th century. Well connected politically and closely allied with his state’s railroad and banking interests, Spooner was the quintessential party insider and a leader of the Republican “stalwarts.”⁴⁵

Robert La Follette had gained prominence not through the political establishment but by crusading against the party bosses, including Spooner. “Through prodigious effort, magnetic speeches, and a network of personal friendships,” wrote one biographer, “La Follette built a substantial statewide following.” In 1900 he became Wisconsin’s governor.



Wisconsin senators and political rivals John Spooner, left, and Robert La Follette. "Is the Senate to Be Deprived of this Incident Upon the Opening of Congress?" by Clifford Berryman, 1905. Library of Congress.

Over the next five years, backed by a muckraking press, La Follette championed a number of progressive causes, including the direct election of senators. By the time he came to the Senate in 1906, La Follette was a well-known but controversial national figure. He led the faction known as the Republican "half breeds."⁴⁶

It was no secret that Spooner and La Follette disliked each other, noted a reporter, "and that neither will be entirely happy until the other is sent to his political grave." One scholar wrote that each "was determined to annihilate the other, and neither was scrupulous about the methods used." This political battle escalated in the early years of the 20th century as both stalwarts and half-breeds professed to be the

true Republicans. When Governor La Follette ran for reelection in 1904, Spooner and the stalwarts demanded that he be denied the right to seek office as a Republican. This dispute went all the way to the state supreme court, which rejected Spooner's plea. La Follette won the election—as a Republican. La Follette "is an extraordinary figure," commented the *New York Times*, "a reformer who fights machines by organizing a better machine of his own." La Follette's insurgent machine carried him all the way to the Senate.⁴⁷

On January 4, 1906, the Chamber was busy, the galleries were packed, and

no one knew what to expect. These two men, who personified the transition from Gilded Age to Progressive Era, had remained silent about their plans for the day. Then, just before noon, the doors of the Senate Chamber swung open and in walked Spooner and La Follette. Arm in arm, they marched down the center aisle, as whispers were heard in the press gallery. "Wonder if La Follette is pinching Spooner's arm," asked a reporter. "Maybe Spooner will trip him before they reach the desk," said another. Spooner later explained that he did what was "in accord with the traditions of the Senate, due to the State which has honored me, and due to myself as a gentleman." It seems that even the most bitter of political enemies must bow to Senate traditions.⁴⁸

Fighting Bob Lives to Fight Another Day

It was a hot day in 1908. In fact, the heat was so intense on that day before air conditioning that the interior temperature of the Senate Chamber had surpassed 90 degrees. As the month of May drew to a close, the Senate planned to adjourn, as was its custom, on May 30 and remain out of session until December. The weary senators—a bit irritable after a busy session—hoped to complete their legislative agenda quickly and head for home, but everything came to a halt on May 29 when Robert La Follette of Wisconsin decided to launch a filibuster.⁴⁹

The dynamic and forceful La Follette, known to his contemporaries as “Fighting Bob,” opposed the adoption of a conference report on the Aldrich-Vreeland Act, an emergency bill designed to allow U.S. currency to be backed by railroad bonds and to establish a National Monetary Commission. Hoping to stir up support, and perhaps to improve his chances for a presidential nomination, Robert La Follette took to the floor shortly after noon on Friday the 29th. “My voice will hold out for six weeks,” he proclaimed to his frustrated colleagues, “and my strength will go along with it.”⁵⁰



Senator Robert La Follette. Library of Congress.

As La Follette continued speaking into the wee hours of May 30, he looked for ways to bolster his strength and maintain his endurance. A number of times—35 times—he demanded a quorum call and took advantage of the roll call to rest his voice. As he began his 13th hour of talking, he sent a page to the Senate restaurant for a glass of milk fortified with eggs. “It is time for me to take my rations,” he said to the few senators in attendance as he took a sip of the drink. Visibly alarmed, he took another sip, then thrust it aside. “Take it away,” he demanded. “It’s drugged.”

Certainly, something was not right about the glass of milk. Before long, La Follette experienced “digestive difficulties” and became drenched in perspiration. As the hours wore on, he became increasingly ill, but the iron-willed senator refused to relinquish the floor. “Again and again,” noted a reporter, La Follette “seemed on the point of breaking down, but his wonderful recuperative powers never failed him” and he was “triumphant the whole night through.” He continued speaking for another six hours, until a colleague relieved him around 7:00 a.m., at which time Fighting

Bob took to his bed and sought medical attention.⁵¹

Was the milk poisoned? A subsequent analysis revealed enough toxic bacteria to kill anyone who might have consumed the entire contents of the glass, but did anyone have a motive to poison Robert La Follette? Well, at least half of the Senate wanted to stop the filibuster. Perhaps the kitchen workers, not happy to be stuck at work all night, let the glass of milk and eggs sit a little too long unrefrigerated? We will never know for sure. Most likely, the culprit was the intense heat that had turned some rooms of the Capitol into ovens and the Senate Chamber into an incubator for such bacteria.

La Follette’s filibuster failed to stop the passage of the Aldrich-Vreeland bill, but Fighting Bob lived to fight another day. For another 17 years, in fact, La Follette championed railroad regulation, promoted direct election of senators, initiated the investigation of the Teapot Dome scandal, and campaigned for the presidency three times, before dying in office in 1925. His was a remarkable career—a career that might not have happened if the rebellious senator had finished that glass of milk in 1908.⁵²

Maud Younger’s Victory

Maud Younger was a tenacious, politically astute woman who was tremendously influential in securing Senate passage of the Nineteenth Amendment that, when ratified in 1920, gave voting rights to most women across the nation. Unfortunately, Maud Younger isn’t mentioned in many Senate history books, but she’s an important part of this Senate story.

Born to a wealthy San Francisco family in 1870, Younger’s experience of working in a New York City

settlement house inspired her to pursue a career in public service. She returned to California and began lobbying for protective labor laws and woman suffrage. Before long, her success as a lobbyist caught the attention of women’s rights activist Alice Paul, who invited Younger to come to Washington, D.C., to lead the National Woman’s Party’s campaign for the Nineteenth Amendment.⁵³

Younger traveled east and took Washington by storm in 1913. To gain support for women’s voting rights, she devised new strategies to lobby the still

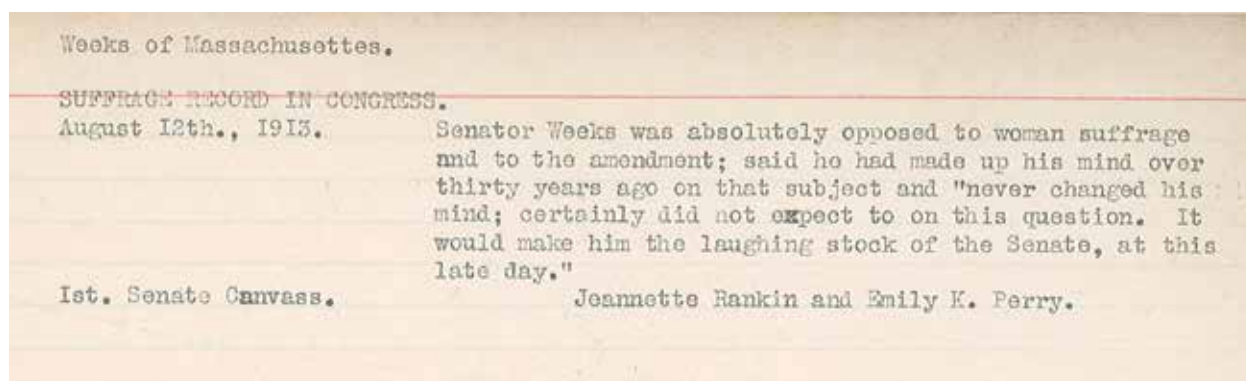


Maud Younger. Library of Congress.

all-male membership of Congress. She meticulously documented every detail of the members' lives and daily routines on small index cards. If a senator was known to arrive at his office every day at 7:30 a.m., Younger had a female lobbyist waiting outside his office at 7:29. If a senator claimed his constituents would not support the amendment, she coordinated massive letter-writing campaigns in his home state. Everywhere senators went, they found a suffragist with a sign or a petition. "Nagging!" complained one member. "If you women would only stop nagging!" Younger even lobbied senators' families. "Some married men," she explained, "listen to their mothers more than to their wives."⁵⁴

Working with Alice Paul and other suffrage leaders, Younger organized the so-called "Siege of the Senate" in 1913. Hundreds of female activists descended upon Washington in automobiles, carrying thousands of petitions. Marching up the Capitol steps, they chanted, "We want action now." Despite such efforts, in 1914 the Senate rejected the amendment.⁵⁵

Then came World War I. While American soldiers fought overseas, and young women served in military units as nurses, translators, and drivers, on the home front suffragists battled powerful institutions still opposed to female suffrage. Activists were attacked, arrested, and sent to jail. They staged hunger



Senator John Weeks's suffrage record in Congress, compiled by Maud Younger for the National Woman's Party, 1913. National Woman's Party Records, Library of Congress.

strikes and endured forced feedings. By 1918 the ongoing civil unrest pushed President Woodrow Wilson to action. "Give justice to women," the president pleaded to senators on September 30, 1918. The very next day, the Senate again voted on the amendment, and again fell short of the two-thirds vote required for passage. Five weeks later, another vote failed, but this time by just a single vote.

To Maud Younger, this was a sign not of failure but of progress, and she redoubled her efforts. When the House passed the amendment in May of 1919, the focus shifted to the Senate. Finally, on June 4, 1919, as women watched from the gallery, the Senate overcame yet another effort to kill the bill and adopted the amendment, 56 to 25. Younger and her fellow suffragists had won—with two votes to spare.⁵⁶

Senator Socks Constituent

Have you ever had a day when you have just reached your wit's end, when you have had enough and something snaps? Perhaps that is what happened to Massachusetts senator Henry Cabot Lodge on a spring day in 1917.

Throughout Senate history, there have been occasions when a frustrated senator, carried away by the heat of the moment, has lost control, striking out verbally or physically against another senator. In 1902, for example, South Carolina senator Benjamin Tillman punched his home-state colleague John McLaurin in the face after McLaurin questioned his integrity. There have been a few cases when an angry constituent attacked a senator. In 1921 a man

bearing a grudge about a land deal entered the office of Nevada senator Charles Henderson, calmly pulled out a pistol, and shot the unsuspecting senator. Fortunately for Henderson, the constituent's aim was very poor, and the bullet only grazed his hand. And there is the 1917 incident involving Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, possibly the only case in which a senator attacked a constituent.⁵⁷

Anxiety was running high in early 1917. American involvement in the First World War was imminent. In fact, President Woodrow Wilson was set to address Congress on April 2, 1917, and everyone understood that the president intended to ask for a declaration of war against Germany. When that day



Senator Henry Cabot Lodge. Library of Congress.

arrived, large crowds of flag-waving patriots flooded onto Capitol Hill to voice their support for the war. They were countered by scores of protestors, pacifists who came to Washington to demand nonintervention. Tensions rose and confrontations ensued. As one reporter commented, “The capital, bedecked with the National colors and overflowing with patriotic enthusiasm, gave the peace advocates anything but a cordial reception.” Undaunted, the pacifists marched up the Capitol steps wearing banners declaring, “We Want Peace.”⁵⁸

Among those protestors for peace was a young minor league baseball player from Boston named Alexander Bannwart who was determined to confront his senator, Henry Cabot Lodge. An influential member of the Foreign Relations Committee, Lodge had been an outspoken war hawk and therefore a likely target for the pacifists. Bannwart found the senator in his committee office in the Capitol. Confronted by his

constituent, Lodge stated rather mundanely, “I regret that I cannot agree with your position, but I must do my duty as I see fit.” Angered by the dismissal, Bannwart replied, “Anyone who wants to go to war is a coward. You’re a damned coward!” That was too much for Lodge. “You’re a damned liar!” Lodge rebutted, and then the 67-year-old senator socked his young constituent squarely on the jaw. Bannwart temporarily forgot his pacifist nature and returned the blow, knocking Lodge back

against the wall. Bystanders intervened, taking Bannwart to the floor. It quickly devolved into a rumble, as staffers rescued Lodge from further harm. Eventually, Capitol Police hauled the bruised and beaten ballplayer off to jail.⁵⁹

Lodge’s office tried to spin the story, declaring the senator had acted in self-defense, but Lodge eventually admitted that he had struck the first blow. Almost immediately, Lodge’s fistfight with the pacifist became a symbol of the war fever that gripped the nation. Notes and telegrams of praise flooded into Lodge’s Senate office. “Bully for you, Lodge,” wrote one admirer. We “glory in your spunk,” wrote another. Lodge seemed rather amused, if a bit puzzled, by it all. “I suddenly became recognized as a statesman,” he noted, “because I hit [a pacifist] in the jaw.” Hopefully, this incident will remain as not only the first, but also the last time that a senator socked a constituent.⁶⁰

The Story of Bishop Sims

As a child, having been born into slavery in 1843, John Sims was forced to train the bloodhounds his master used to track runaway slaves. As the Civil War began in 1861, the teenaged Sims escaped bondage in his native South Carolina and fled north. When he died 73 years later, Sims was a beloved and well-known figure on Capitol Hill, a friend and confidant of some of the most powerful men in Washington, D.C. Despite

his impressive rise from the bonds of slavery to the corridors of power, he remains largely unknown. That's because John Sims wasn't a powerful senator or a prominent member of Capitol Hill staff—he was the Senate's barber.⁶¹

Sims's dangerous flight north in 1861 landed him in the town of Oskaloosa in southeast Iowa. He arrived with no funds and no marketable skills, but he managed to find work in a barbershop. An



Senate barbershop, ca. 1925. Architect of the Capitol.

apprenticeship followed, and soon he was earning a living as a skilled barber. Then, in the mid-1880s, came the first of two fateful senatorial encounters—when Iowa senator William Allison got a haircut.

Throughout the 19th and well into the 20th century, many Senate jobs were filled through patronage. Senator Allison, who chaired the Appropriations Committee, had plenty of patronage to give. He brought Sims to the Senate, where the barber's tonsorial talents gained recognition. Sims "knows the whims [and] the vanities" of the Senate, reported the *New York Times*. His skill with shears and razor kept him employed long after his patron was gone, but it was Sims's weekend job and a second notable encounter that brought him to public attention.⁶²

John Sims moonlighted as a preacher at the Universal Church of Holiness in Washington, D.C. One day in 1916, Ohio senator (and future president) Warren G. Harding sat in the barber's chair. "Sims," he said, "I'm coming down next Sunday to hear you preach." A few days later, to the surprise of the entirely African American congregation, Senator Harding attended their service. "He walked in by himself," Sims recalled, "and took a seat near the middle of the church and waited until I was through." When the service ended, Harding thanked Sims and returned to the Capitol to spread the news of the preaching talents of the Senate barber.

A week later, Harding returned to the Universal Church of Holiness and brought several of his colleagues with him. As the years passed, more and more senators appeared. Vice Presidents Calvin Coolidge (later president) and Charles Dawes also attended. "From the North, from the South, from the East and the West they have come to hear me," Sims explained. "And to think that I have come up from a lowly place of humility . . . , to where I have the honor of preaching to those who are high in the nation's affairs!" Sims insisted that he owed it all to

Harding. "He started it all—and the Senators have been coming to hear me ever since."

The preaching barber became known as the "Bishop of the Senate." His prayers, noteworthy for both length and fervor, also enlivened his official Senate duties. "[If] he thought the occasion required [it]," commented a reporter, Sims would "drop to his knees . . . in the midst of . . . a shave and pray with all his heart" for the senator sitting in his chair. In 1921, as the Senate prepared to vote for its next official chaplain, Senator Bert Fernald of Maine asked, "Can we vote for anybody who has not been placed in nomination?" With an affirmative answer to his question, he cast his vote for John Sims, although the post went to the Reverend Joseph J. Muir.⁶³

Bishop Sims was strictly nonpartisan and loyally supported all of his patrons at election time. When two of his favorite Senate clients—Democrat Joseph Robinson of Arkansas and Kansas Republican Charles Curtis—competed for the vice presidency in 1928, Sims fervently prayed for each to win their party's nomination. His prayers were answered and the two men faced each other in the general election. "Who are you for [now]," Robinson asked the barber, "myself or Senator Curtis?" "I prayed for your nominations," Sims replied diplomatically, but now "you gotta hustle for yourself."

John Sims achieved success, as barber and as preacher, but one cherished goal remained elusive—to pray in an open session of the Senate. "Sims cannot die happy unless he has had at least one chance to shrive the Senate," reported the *Baltimore Sun* in 1928. "For many years he has been longing to be allowed to open one of the Senate sessions with a prayer." That year, it looked as if the 85-year-old preacher's wish would finally come true. With the second session of the 70th Congress set to convene in December, a senator pledged to invite him to give the daily prayer, but no record of such an occasion has been found. It seems that wish remained unfulfilled.⁶⁴

Rising from slavery to become friend and confidant of senators, vice presidents, and presidents, John Sims remained employed in the Senate barbershop until his death at age 91. Even after he retired from active barbering and served only as supervisor, he reported to work every day, preaching to the Senate community. Eventually, age and illness took their toll and kept Sims away from the Capitol, prompting senators to visit him at his home where they could still count on his advice and encouragement. “Don’t you worry,”

Sims reassured Minnesota senator Henrik Shipstead during one of the senator’s visits to the sickbed, “I will be back in the barbershop in a couple of days.” When Sims passed away on March 29, 1934, Shipstead echoed many of his colleagues when he described the preaching barber as “the most beloved and popular man on Capitol Hill.” A reporter once asked Sims to explain the secret of his popularity among senators. I’m just “shaving and saving,” Sims responded. Give a good shave, and always preach salvation.⁶⁵

The Man in the Green Hat

George Lawrence Cassiday. Not a familiar name? Washingtonians know him by his more popular moniker, “The Man in the Green Hat.” During the era of Prohibition, Cassiday was the Senate’s bootlegger.

George Cassiday’s career in the prohibited liquor trade began in 1920, following his military service in World War I and soon after ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which banned the manufacture, transportation, and sale

of intoxicating liquors. A former rail worker, Cassiday found himself out of work in post-war Washington. One day he agreed to deliver some bootleg liquor to a member of the House of Representatives. Soon, he was making an average of 25 deliveries a day, transporting bottles in a large briefcase. “George,” asked one representative, “did it ever occur to you [that] it would be easier to bring supplies into the building in larger lots and distribute [them] from [the inside]?”



The “Man in the Green Hat,” George L. Cassiday. Library of Congress.

Storage space was secured, and Cassidy's business in the House of Representatives flourished.⁶⁶

Then came the infamous "green hat incident" of 1925. Although details of what happened vary among sources, Cassidy's own account indicated that he was making a regular delivery to the House office building when an unsympathetic Capitol Police officer stopped him for questioning. Surprised to be detained by a policeman who had seen him enter the building numerous times before, Cassidy accompanied the officer but managed to discard his briefcase along the way. When quizzed by reporters, Capitol Hill officials would only confirm that the liquor had been carried into the building by "a man in a green hat." The widely publicized event prompted Speaker Nicholas Longworth to ban Cassidy from the House office building. Undeterred, the bootlegger shifted his operations to the Senate and established a new base in the Senate office building.⁶⁷

Cassiday found senators to be "more cautious and a shrewder class of people" than representatives. Senate purchases were made through secretaries or clerks. One senator kept his liquor on the top shelf of a bookcase, tucked away behind bound volumes of the *Congressional Record*. When he needed the supply restocked, he told his secretary to call "his librarian"

and report that he was in need of "some new reading matter." Which liquor did senators prefer? According to Cassidy, "All the Kentucky bourbon brands were in great favor." It was a most successful business. "There was one serious drawback," Cassidy complained. "When Congress recessed . . . , the bottom fell out of the market."⁶⁸

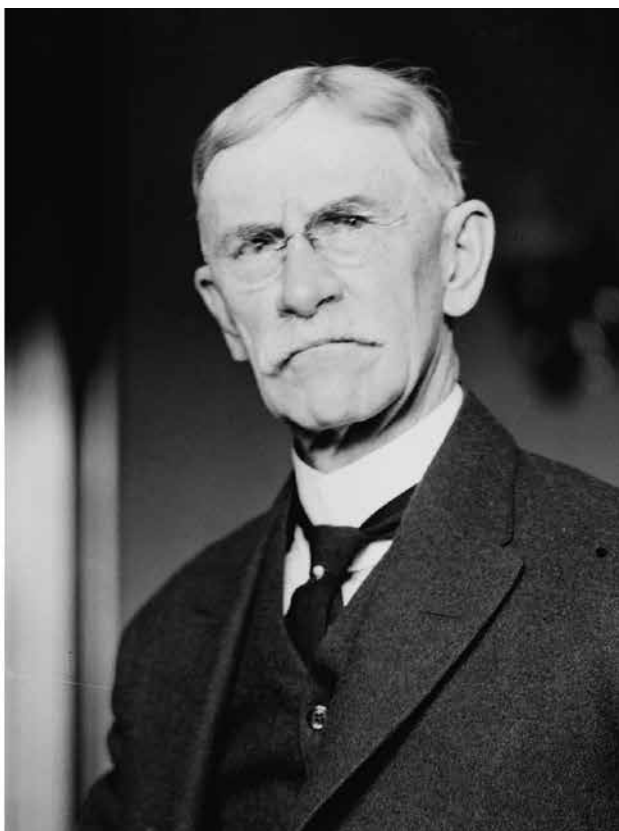
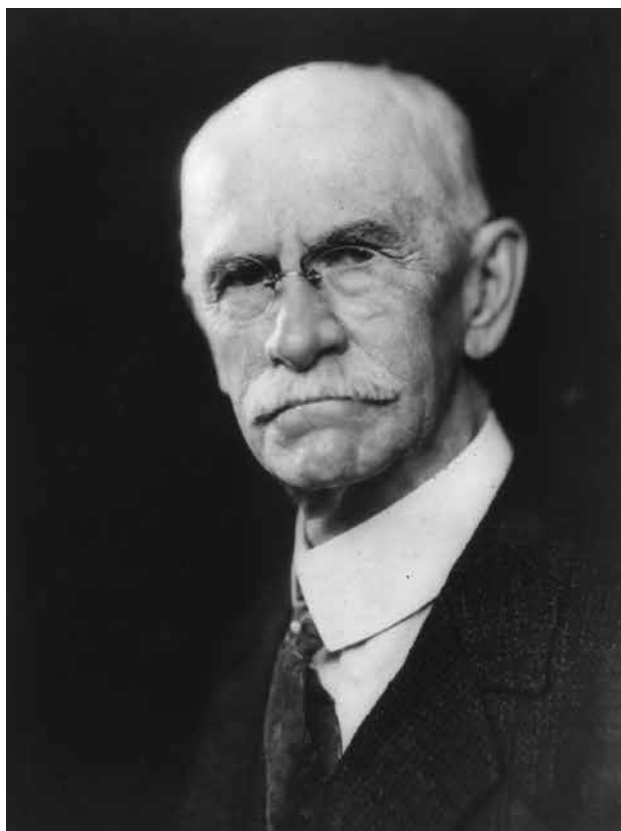
By 1929, even as Prohibition grew increasingly unpopular, liquor-related crimes had become a serious problem, prompting stricter enforcement of Prohibition laws. A police raid on Cassidy's home in November uncovered 266 quarts of premium bootleg liquor. Vice President Charles Curtis authorized a "sting operation" to end Cassidy's Senate career. On February 18, 1930, undercover agents nabbed "the man in the green hat" with six bottles of gin in the senators' parking lot.⁶⁹

Cassiday served an 18-month prison term. He also became famous. In October 1930 the *Washington Post* ran a front-page series, written by Cassidy, telling the "true story of the Capitol Hill bootlegger." Regarding his Senate customers, Cassidy wrote: "Some of them I found were mighty good fellows, and others not so good, but I learned right off the bat that when it comes to eating, drinking, and having a good time . . . , they are as human as other folks."⁷⁰

Senator Thomas Brings Spring to the Senate

Spring is a splendid affair in Washington, D.C. Daffodils sprout, crocuses emerge, tulips blanket hillsides, and the cherry blossoms explode in an array of pink and white. For many years, Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia welcomed spring to the Senate Chamber with a poetry recitation. In March of 2001, for

example, he quoted William Wordsworth: "And then my heart with pleasure fills / And dances with the daffodils." Long before Senator Byrd took office, however, senators had another, rather unique method for heralding the arrival of spring. They took their cues from the junior senator from Colorado, Charles Thomas.⁷¹



Senator Charles Thomas in spring, left, and winter. Library of Congress.

Born in Georgia in 1849, Thomas moved to Colorado in 1871. He built a successful law practice, but his main ambition was to serve in the United States Congress. Unfortunately, his rather caustic manner alienated his would-be constituents and undermined his political ambitions. Not one to give up, Thomas ran in three separate elections over a 24-year period, once for the House of Representatives and twice for the Senate. He lost each time. Finally, in 1913, the Colorado state legislature sent the 63-year-old Thomas to the Senate to fill a vacant seat.⁷²

When Thomas took the oath of office in January of 1913, spectators observed a distinguished looking gentleman—tall, neatly dressed, with spectacles and a nice head of hair neatly parted just off center. When winter turned to spring, however, Thomas did something surprising. He went bald. Evidently, Thomas had become prematurely bald as a young man. Quite

sensitive to cold weather, he began wearing a full toupee during the winter months to keep his head warm, then tucked away the hairpiece when winter turned to spring. Every year, on a day when he felt the hint of spring in the air, Thomas abandoned his winter toupee and went to work baldheaded.⁷³

In the spring of 1913, Thomas followed this annual ritual and walked, bare-headed, to Capitol Hill. When he reached the Senate Chamber, however, a doorkeeper blocked his way. Only senators are allowed to enter the Chamber, the doorkeeper insisted. “But my friend, I have a right here,” Thomas explained. “I am Senator Thomas of Colorado.” The puzzled doorkeeper took a closer look. “No sir, you couldn’t be,” he said. “Senator Thomas has a wonderful head of hair.” Fortunately, another senator appeared and confirmed to the doorkeeper that Thomas was indeed the junior senator from Colorado.

When Thomas entered the Chamber, Illinois senator J. Hamilton Lewis took note and likened the appearance of the toupee-free Thomas to the first sighting of a robin. A new Senate tradition was born. Each year, senators along with reporters watched for the telltale signal. “At two minutes past twelve o’clock noon today,” reported the *New York Times* in one such

account, “Spring arrived in the Senate Chamber. At that hour, Senator Thomas of Colorado came in without his wig.” When summer turned to fall, Thomas reversed the ritual and the toupee reappeared. As the *Washington Post* explained, “Not until that senatorial weather prophet dons his toupee will his colleagues unpack their great coats and start a fire in their furnaces.”⁷⁴

Cactus Jack Presides

When John Nance Garner of Texas became vice president on March 4, 1933, he could boast of a long and distinguished career in public service. He had held elective office since 1898, first in the Texas state legislature and then for 30 years in the U.S. House of Representatives, where he became Speaker in 1931. That’s 35 years of legislative experience, but he had never served in the Senate. As it turned out, that mattered.

Born in 1868, Garner grew up in Red River County, studied law, and established a practice in Uvalde, Texas. After serving as county judge, he moved to the state legislature, where the Texas native gained a colorful nickname. As the legislature debated the choice of a state flower, Garner fervently endorsed the prickly pear cactus. Texans chose the bluebonnet instead, but for the rest of his life Garner was known as “Cactus Jack.”⁷⁵

During his 30 years in the House, Cactus Jack supported the federal income tax, promoted rural investment, and vehemently opposed Prohibition. In fact, it was during the years of Prohibition that Garner joined with Speaker Nicholas Longworth to establish the “Board of Education,” a small room in the House wing of the Capitol where members met for evening cocktails and conversation. “Strike a



Vice President John Nance Garner. Library of Congress.

blow for liberty,” Garner would proclaim as he served bootleg liquor to his colleagues.⁷⁶

By 1932 Cactus Jack was a well-known figure and a likely presidential contender. When it became clear that he trailed behind Franklin D. Roosevelt in the race for the White House that year, Garner joined the ticket as the vice-presidential candidate. On March 4,

1933, the Speaker became vice president and therefore presiding officer of the Senate. Senators were not prepared for what was to come!⁷⁷

“In his own quiet way,” commented a reporter, “Vice President Garner has set upon a course of speeding up the Senate.” Cactus Jack was accustomed to the faster pace of the House. The Senate’s deliberative nature frustrated him. He was irritated by filibusters, and especially by Louisiana senator Huey Long’s talkathons. One day, in the midst of filibustering the National Recovery Act, Long demanded that all senators be called to the Chamber to listen. No, Garner quipped, that would be “unusual cruelty under the Bill of Rights.” On another occasion, Long stated a parliamentary inquiry: “How should a senator who is half in favor of this bill and half against it cast his vote?” “Get a saw,” Garner replied, “saw yourself in two.”⁷⁸

Especially irksome to the vice president was the Senate’s molasses-paced legislative process, so he

adopted a novel style of presiding. As soon as a bill was read, Garner nimbly and speedily proclaimed: “The question is shall the bill be engrossed, read the third time, and passed. There being no objection the bill is passed.” Then, boom, down came the gavel. “In just that way,” the *Boston Globe* reported, “the bill to liberalize medicinal liquor prescriptions passed in 10 minutes, without a word of debate, and before the leaders knew what was happening.” Senators, caught off guard, protested, but Garner simply retorted: “It’s their hard luck.” He even used this technique to confirm nominations. “Without objection, confirmed,” was all he said before bringing down the gavel to confirm a number of nominees. Garner called it the “buggy whip” system of presiding over the Senate. Of course, it didn’t last long. Senators soon caught on and became prepared for the rapid-fire pronouncements, but for a brief period in 1933, the Senate was remarkably productive.⁷⁹

The Kingfish Puts on a Show

Once described as the most entertaining as well as the most dangerous man in American politics, Huey Long of Louisiana remains a storied but controversial figure. Born in 1893, Long worked as a traveling salesman, earned a law degree in a single year, and entered public life in 1918. He built a political power base among Louisiana’s small towns and rural districts and became governor in 1928. A supporter dubbed him “the Kingfish”—after the comical lodge master of the popular “Amos ‘N Andy” radio show—and the name stuck.⁸⁰

As governor, Long took on the moneyed interests of Baton Rouge and Wall Street. He

constructed roads and bridges, supplied free textbooks to Louisiana schoolchildren, and called for a dramatic redistribution of wealth. He also exercised near-dictatorial control over state politics and never missed a chance to thrill an audience. He couldn’t remember a time, he once commented, “when my mouth wasn’t open whenever there was a chance to make a speech.”⁸¹

In January of 1932, as the nation endured the darkest winter of the Great Depression, Huey Long became a U.S. senator. Promoting a “share-our-wealth” plan that drew upon his “Every Man a King” philosophy (a phrase he borrowed from William Jennings Bryan), Long quickly gained a national

following. Soon, the Kingfish was a household name. Over the next three and a half years, the Senate Chamber became Huey Long's stage, his flamboyant oratorical style his trademark, and the filibuster his favorite tool of persuasion.⁸²

Long's rhetoric was a distinctive blend of humor, scripture, and absurdity, but it played well in a nation hit hard by economic depression. "Better than any other politician I've known," one reporter recalled, "Huey knew what his audiences wanted to hear." In the Senate, Long's extravagant speeches made good copy for newspapers while promoting a radical agenda. He came to the Senate "with only one project in mind," he stated, to "spread the wealth of the land among all of the people."⁸³

On June 12, 1935, the Louisiana senator staged his most noteworthy filibuster. He hoped to force the Senate's Democratic leadership to back a proposal, opposed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, to require all senior employees of the National Recovery Administration be confirmed by the Senate. If his proposal succeeded, Long could block political enemies seeking coveted NRA jobs. As the 15-hour speech continued, Long carefully analyzed sections of the Constitution, then offered his favorite recipes for fried Louisiana oysters and potlikkers. At one point, seeing a number of senators dozing at their desks, Long demanded that Vice President John Nance Garner wake them and make them listen,



Senator Huey Long. Library of Congress.

but Garner refused. Finally, at four in the morning, nature called and Huey Long yielded the floor. His proposal failed.⁸⁴

Three months later, on September 10, 1935, just as he reached the apex of his power, Huey Long died in Baton Rouge—the victim of an assassin's bullet. Today, Long remains a controversial figure, but even his critics agree on one undeniable fact: The Kingfish could put on a mighty good show!⁸⁵

Barkley vs. Harrison

On July 14, 1937, Senate Majority Leader Joseph Robinson died of a heart attack. Democratic majority leader since 1933, Robinson had been a loyal supporter of President

Franklin D. Roosevelt, but Robinson paid a price for that loyalty. In 1937 the tense battle over the president's plan to expand the Supreme Court, known as the Court packing plan, proved to be too much, even

for Robinson. Many tied his death to the stress of that political battle. Now, with Robinson dead, who would become the Democratic leader?⁸⁶

There were two main contenders: Kentucky's Alben Barkley, who had been Robinson's right-hand man, and Mississippi's Pat Harrison, the powerful chairman of the Finance Committee. In normal circumstances, the election might easily have gone to Barkley, but the fight over Court packing had fractured the Democratic caucus. Harrison's reluctant support for the plan as well as his strong opposition to Roosevelt's tax policies gained him allies among New Deal opponents, while Barkley's steadfast loyalty to the president won the support of party regulars. As the factions solidified, Republican senator Arthur Vandenberg gibed: "The Democratic leadership isn't in the bag, it's in two bags."⁸⁷

The question of a successor stirred a whirlwind of debate, and adding to the storm was President Roosevelt. The day after Robinson's death, Roosevelt sent a letter to Barkley that was quickly reprinted in the press. Addressed to "My Dear Alben" and referring to the Kentucky senator as the "acting majority leader," the letter called for passage of the Court bill but also was a thinly veiled endorsement of Barkley as leader. It caused an uproar. The perceived insolence of that "Dear Alben" salutation, which was widely ridiculed, embarrassed Barkley and angered senators who thought the president had no right to interfere in a purely senatorial matter. Publicly, the president proclaimed neutrality, but privately he continued to cajole senators into voting for Barkley.⁸⁸

On July 17, three days after Robinson's death, senators boarded a train for an all-night ride to Arkansas to attend the funeral. Throughout that journey, the leadership election dominated the conversation. Huddling in separate compartments, Barkley and Harrison actively lobbied for votes.



Senators (L-R) Alben Barkley, Key Pittman, and Pat Harrison following the vote for majority leader, July 21, 1937. Library of Congress.

Senators "were indulging in political jockeying the like of which is not often seen at the Capitol itself," noted a reporter. Even at the funeral service, senators had to be strategically seated to avoid factional conflicts and constant politicking.⁸⁹

Four days later, when Democratic senators returned to a caucus meeting to elect a new leader, both contenders announced they had the votes to win. Then, one by one, senators walked to the front of the room and tossed their secret ballot into a battered old Panama hat belonging to Virginia senator Carter Glass. Democrats enjoyed a whopping 75-vote majority in the Senate at the time, so 38 votes were needed to win. As tellers announced the votes, Barkley took an early lead, then Harrison moved to the front. Finally, with just one slip of paper left in that old hat, the tally stood at 37 to 37. The last vote went to Barkley.⁹⁰

Barkley and Harrison quickly called for party unity. "We've got to fight together in the future as we have in the past," proclaimed Barkley. "This is the first time our interests have been apart," Harrison

declared, “and I hope it will be the last time.” Harrison moved to make Barkley’s election unanimous, and his supporters complied, but solidarity was short-lived. Alben Barkley served as Democratic leader for the next 12 years and often struggled to maintain control over his combative caucus. Opponents continued to refer to him derisively as “Dear

Alben,” but his deft handling of wartime legislation eventually won him widespread support. In fact, in 1944, when Barkley suddenly resigned his leadership post over a dispute with President Roosevelt, the caucus promptly—and unanimously—reelected him. He resigned again in 1949—not in protest, but to become vice president of the United States.⁹¹

Leader McNary Builds a Vigilant Opposition

As the 75th Congress convened on January 5, 1937, Senate Minority Leader Charles McNary anticipated a difficult session. The 1936 presidential election had given Franklin D. Roosevelt a landslide victory, returning him to the White House for a second term. Even more troubling for the Republican leader, that year’s congressional elections had produced a very lopsided Senate—76 Democrats, 4 liberal Independents, and 16 Republicans. No doubt, that opening day was not the happiest for Minority Leader McNary.

Known to friends as “Charley Mac,” Charles McNary had come to the Senate by appointment in 1917, then was elected in 1918. He always worked well with colleagues of both parties and with factions within those parties. “I am not a standpatter,” he once said. “Neither am I a hidebound partisan.” In fact, in his early Senate years, McNary often served as a bridge between “old guard” Republicans and the progressive insurgents. The Oregon senator proved to be particularly useful in connecting western Republicans with the powerful eastern establishment. “All Republicans look alike to me,” he proclaimed. As years went by, McNary quietly but steadily edged his way up the leadership ladder.⁹²

In 1933, as an era of Republican dominance ended and the Democratic New Deal era began,

McNary was elected Republican leader by unanimous vote. He remembered well the battles between Democratic president Woodrow Wilson and Republican leader Henry Cabot Lodge. He was determined not to repeat that scenario. As the crisis of the Great Depression continued, therefore, McNary supported many of Roosevelt’s early initiatives. Yet, as minority leader, he was determined to develop what he later called a “worthy and vigilant opposition.” But how to do that with just 16 Republican senators?⁹³

As fate would have it, President Roosevelt helped McNary solve that dilemma. On February 5, 1937, the president announced his controversial plan to enlarge the Supreme Court. McNary knew that he would have to tread carefully, but that was a familiar strategy. He was known for his “cloakroom finesse.” McNary “worked quietly and modestly,” a reporter explained, “always preferring skill over strength and astute strategy to frontal attack.” When the Court packing plan arrived, McNary advised Republicans to keep a low profile “and let the revolting Democrats make their own record.”⁹⁴

Democrats were divided on the issue. At first, many publicly supported the president’s plan but privately expressed apprehension. Throughout the spring



Senate Majority Leader Alben Barkley, left, with Minority Leader Charles McNary. Library of Congress.

and early summer, McNary diligently worked behind the scenes to build a bipartisan coalition to oppose the plan while his Republican colleagues remained mostly silent. When Majority Leader Joseph Robinson died unexpectedly in July, the last vestige of Democratic support for the plan all but crumbled.

1937 came to an end, Republicans still held just 16 seats, but McNary's leadership extended to a large and influential coalition built from both parties. Even new majority leader Alben Barkley understood. When asked about McNary, Barkley quipped, he's "the only real leader around here."⁹⁶

And then the Republican leader spoke. He introduced a motion to return the bill to committee. On July 22, 1937, 56 Democrats joined McNary's small band of Republicans to send Roosevelt's Court packing plan to the Judiciary Committee, which became its graveyard. "McNary not once has appeared in the forefront," wrote columnist Drew Pearson. "Yet behind the scenes he has been the mastermind of the fight against the president."⁹⁵

Charles McNary successfully forged an opposition both worthy and vigilant. As

Homesick Harry's Impromptu Visit

Harry S. Truman was homesick. It had been more than two years since fate pushed him into the presidency in April of 1945. Perhaps he was longing for the bygone days when he was just a junior senator. Maybe that's why he rose to the challenge of Leslie Biffle's dare—and broke a few Senate rules in 1947.

A dozen years earlier, Truman had taken the senatorial oath and became a respected senator

from Missouri. Colleagues appreciated his folksy personality and hard-working style. His first-term accomplishments included a landmark statute that promoted fair competition between railroads and the trucking industry. In his second term, Truman chaired the Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program that looked into charges of waste and corruption in defense contracts. The committee saved the nation millions of dollars and

made Truman a national figure. That put him on the ticket with Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1944, and he became vice president on January 20, 1945. On April 12, he became president.⁹⁷

On July 23, 1947, two years into his presidency and with his party in the minority for the first time in 14 years, Truman came to Capitol Hill to have lunch with a bipartisan group of senators, including the Republican majority leader, Wallace White, and the Democratic minority leader, Alben Barkley. The lunch was hosted by Truman's old friend, Leslie Biffle, a seasoned political operator and former Senate officer who was then executive director of the Democratic

Policy Committee. As the luncheon broke up and senators returned to their duties, Biffle dared his old friend to make an unscheduled visit to the Senate Chamber. Truman accepted the challenge.

Without notice or fanfare, the president quietly slipped into the Senate Chamber, walked directly to a back-row desk he once occupied, and took a seat. The Senate responded with a standing ovation. In the presiding officer's chair, President pro tempore Arthur Vandenberg was startled but quickly recovered. "There are few situations in . . . the Senate for which there is not some available precedent," Vandenberg commented, while others in the Chamber became



President Harry Truman lunches with old friends before an impromptu visit to the Senate Chamber, July 23, 1947. (L–R, seated) Senator Carl Hayden, Truman, First Lady Bess Truman, Senator Alben Barkley, and former secretary of the Senate Leslie Biffle. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

aware of Truman's presence. "[This] happens to be one, however, for which no precedent is known." The delighted Truman smiled but remained silent. "The Chair is very happy to welcome the former Senator from Missouri," Vandenberg stated, but quickly added that the welcome had to be temporary, "because of his regard for the other Senators from Missouri."

The impromptu visit, despite its unprecedented nature, came as a welcome surprise. "It takes an intimate acquaintance with American folkways to reconcile the high dignity of the President's office with a piece of tomfoolery out of Mark Twain's *Missouri*," commented a reporter. "Tom Sawyer in the White House is not expected to go fishin' with his old pals," but that's just what the president did. Then, in defiance of Senate rules, Vandenberg recognized "the ex-senator from Missouri." In a short address, Truman admitted that his actions were unorthodox,

but he had an explanation. "I sometimes get homesick for this seat," he told his former colleagues. "I spent as a Member of the Senate what I think of as the best 10 years of my life."⁹⁸

It was a lovely moment of senatorial bipartisanship. "The Senate never invites anyone to speak in the Senate but Senators," Truman noted, "and you are exceedingly kind to me to give me an opportunity." Truman completed his impromptu address to the cheers of senators, staff, and visitors in the galleries. Senator Barkley called it "a happy interlude" in the Senate's "serious routine." But it was just an interlude. No one would have guessed that for months, President Truman had been locked in bitter partisan debate with Senate Republicans and before long would ridicule his congressional opposition for being part of the "do-nothing 80th Congress." One might say, "Well, that's politics." More accurately, it was a brief respite from "politics as usual."⁹⁹

Overwork Makes the Senate Surly

"The Senate is beginning to show signs of overwork." That observation came from newspaper columnist Jack Anderson as the Senate continued working past its targeted adjournment date in 1950. "Sessions are growing longer," he wrote, "and tempers shorter."

Stories of petty bickering and outright feuds had become commonplace—including battles between same-state senators. New Hampshire's Charles Tobey and Styles Bridges barely spoke to each other. Utah freshman Arthur Watkins never forgave Elbert Thomas for cutting him out of a Capitol ceremony dedicating a statue of Brigham Young. Tennessee senator Kenneth McKellar frequently

disparaged Estes Kefauver. In fact, their relationship became so acrimonious that McKellar ordered his staff—on pain of dismissal—never to mention Kefauver's name!

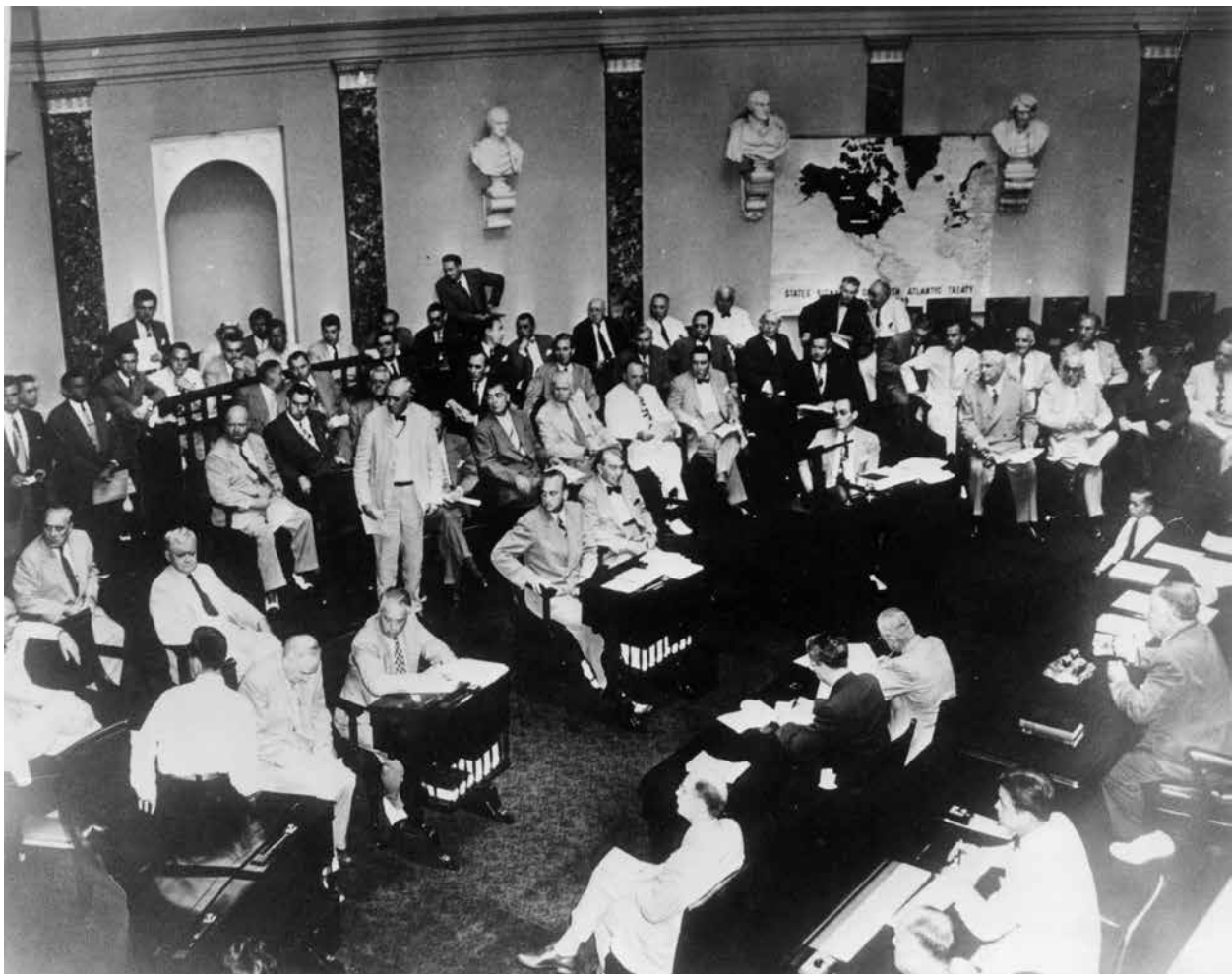
Most senatorial feuds crossed state lines, however, and some even crossed the Hill. Once, while Senator Harry Byrd, Jr., of Virginia was away visiting his sick mother, Minnesota's Hubert Humphrey tried his best to abolish Byrd's favorite committee—the Joint Committee on the Reduction of Nonessential Federal Expenditures. Humphrey argued that the committee itself was a nonessential expenditure. Byrd spent the rest of his career trying to get even with Humphrey. On one contentious

day in 1950, Georgia senator Walter George left the Chamber in despair. “It’s the biggest wonder in the world,” he grumbled, “that we get anything done in this bedlam.”¹⁰⁰

The confrontation that inspired Jack Anderson’s article involved two of the Hill’s best known curmudgeons: Tennessee’s Kenneth McKellar and the irascible representative, Clarence Cannon of Missouri. Chairmen of the Senate and House Appropriations Committees, they had argued bitterly for years over federal spending. “A gavel-bashing, name-calling clash between 81-year-old . . . McKellar, and 71-year-old . . . Cannon, was broken up . . . just short

of physical violence,” noted the *Washington Post* on August 19, 1950. While in conference, McKellar had angrily commented on Cannon’s personality using language peppered with words such as blind, stupid, and pigheaded. Infuriated, Cannon sprang from his chair, rushed towards McKellar, and shouted, “I’ve taken all I’m going to.” In response, McKellar grabbed the gavel and tried to rap it on Cannon’s head. “In the nick of time,” the *Post* reported, a staff member “grabbed Cannon” and “two senators seized the gavel from McKellar.”¹⁰¹

Why was the Senate so disagreeable in 1950? A number of possible causes for the combative



The Senate debates the United States’ membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, while temporarily meeting in the Old Senate Chamber in 1950. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

atmosphere come to mind. A long debate over the North Atlantic Treaty Organization had just ended. Wisconsin senator Joseph McCarthy had launched his hunt for Communists. The invasion of South Korea had catapulted the nation into war. Senators were debating Social Security amendments and arguing over the Internal Security Act. To make matters worse, it was an election year. And perhaps there was one other factor to consider. For much of 1949 and 1950, senators were forced to work in the

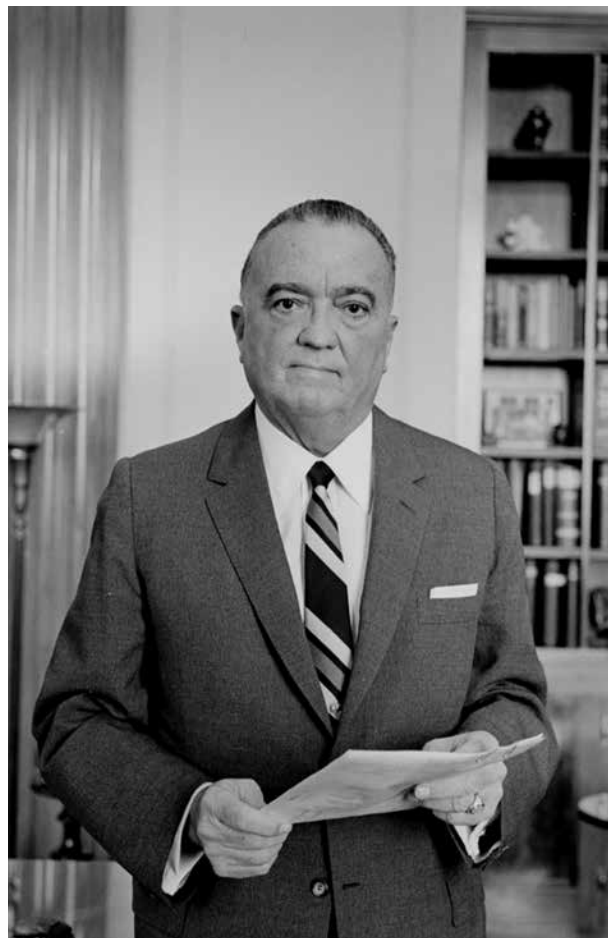
Old Senate Chamber while their current Chamber underwent renovation. Ninety-six senators were jammed into a space built for half that number. Only floor leaders got desks. Other senators squeezed into uncomfortable chairs and crowded into corners, at times forced to climb over each other just to find an empty seat. Under such circumstances, as Jack Anderson concluded, is it any wonder that “senators were discarding their courtly manners and snapping at each other”?¹⁰²

J. Edgar Hoover Moonlights on Senate Staff

The name J. Edgar Hoover is not a name typically associated with the United States Senate, but for a brief period in the early 1950s, Hoover played a key role in a significant chapter of Senate history.

On April 6, 1950, the body of political boss and gambling racketeer Charles Binaggio was found lying beneath a portrait of Harry S. Truman in a Democratic Party clubhouse in Kansas City, Missouri. He had been shot four times in the head, apparently the victim of a mob hit. Binaggio’s murder prompted the Senate to create the Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime, chaired by Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee. The sensational topic of the investigation guaranteed press coverage, but Kefauver further heightened public interest with two pivotal decisions. First, he decided to take the investigation on the road, holding public hearings in more than a dozen cities. Second, he admitted television cameras into the hearing room.¹⁰³

As hearings began in May, the Kefauver Committee faced a serious obstacle. The most important



J. Edgar Hoover. Library of Congress.

witnesses were those least willing to appear, or even to be located—members of the criminal underworld, gangsters not eager to attract publicity. Without locating such witnesses, hearings would prove futile. To solve this problem, Senator Kefauver turned to Senate Sergeant at Arms Joseph Duke of Arizona, a quiet, unassuming man who, as one observer noted, looked like an insurance salesman. Joe Duke acknowledged his own limitations and sought outside help—from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Duke enlisted the help of J. Edgar Hoover—temporarily naming the FBI boss as deputy sergeant at arms—and then accompanied Hoover through the seedy world of organized crime, rounding up a host of dangerous gangsters. The Kefauver Committee got its witnesses, including such notorious criminals as Jacob “Greasy Thumb” Guzik, a Chicago crime boss who had been Al Capone’s pay-off man, and the reputed “prime minister of the underworld” Frank Costello.¹⁰⁴

The result was dramatic television viewing. “Something big . . . smashed into the homes of millions of Americans” reported the Associated Press, “when television cameras, cold-eyed and relentless, were trained on the crime hearings.” Witness after witness, questioned under TV’s watchful eye, seemed to confirm the nation’s worst suspicions. When Costello refused to testify on camera, the committee ordered networks not to show his face. Instead, they focused on his nervously fidgeting hands. This surprisingly riveting sight mesmerized television audiences. Costello became known as TV’s “first



Senate Sergeant at Arms Joseph Duke. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

headless star.” Critics complained of sensationalism, but the viewing public became devoted fans, sending scores of approving letters to the committee.¹⁰⁵

When hearings ended in 1951, there was much debate over the consequences of Kefauver’s investigation and his pioneering use of television. But one thing was certain—enlisting the aid of J. Edgar Hoover had been a stroke of genius. Thanks to the G-man, Kefauver exposed a hidden world of organized crime and became a national political figure in the process. Joe Duke gained a new reputation as a fearless man hunter. And J. Edgar Hoover, having tracked down numerous reluctant witnesses for the Crime Committee, returned to his day job.¹⁰⁶

Mach Buster Maggie, Supersonic Senator from Maine

Throughout her more than 32-year congressional career, Margaret Chase Smith of Maine had a strong interest in the military. Becoming a U.S. representative in 1940, she quickly emerged as a vocal advocate for military preparedness. As a member of the House Naval Affairs Committee, she toured extensively through the Pacific theater of war. Later, in the Senate, she became ranking member of the Armed Services Committee. She also served as a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Air Force Reserve from 1950 to 1958. In each of these positions, Smith championed in particular the role of women in the military and the importance of military families. Not surprisingly, this Cold War-era senator also became a keen supporter of the space program.¹⁰⁷

In 1957, at the request of Air Force Secretary James Douglas, Senator Smith donned a military uniform for a month-long active tour of duty to investigate problems related to recruitment and retention of military personnel. Smith's military travels took her to Colorado, Nebraska, Florida, Puerto Rico, and the Panama Canal. They also landed her in Los Angeles, where the adventurous senator established a unique milestone in her career. On December 3, 1957, following a day of special training, the 60-year-old Smith suited up in flight gear, donned a parachute and oxygen mask, and climbed into an F-100 Super Sabre Jet piloted by Air Force Major Clyde Good. Reaching speeds of nearly 1,000 miles per hour, Smith became the first women in Congress to break the sound barrier.¹⁰⁸



Senator Margaret Chase Smith climbs into an Air Force jet, December 3, 1957. Courtesy of the Margaret Chase Smith Library.

“Supersonic flight and barrel rolls at 40,000 feet disturbed the woman Senator’s composure not one whit,” commented an observer. “It was wonderful,” Smith exclaimed. “I enjoyed the barrel rolls, and even the G-pressure didn’t bother me.” She did have one concern, she later confessed. Major Good had warned her not to touch a particular button on her right. “Why?” she asked. He explained that it was the ejection button. For the rest of the flight, Smith kept her right arm tightly pinned by her left to avoid accidentally pushing that button.¹⁰⁹

Smith's 30-minute flight earned her official membership in the "Mach Busters Club," which in 1957 still had very few members. Remarkably, this record-setting adventure gained little press

attention, but the *Los Angeles Times* took note. For the flight, the *Times* reported, Mach-buster Maggie "wore a bright orange flight suit and high heeled pumps."¹¹⁰

Margaret Chase Smith, Foreign Correspondent

Margaret Chase Smith enjoyed a long congressional career that showed her to be a woman of courage and intelligence. Fiercely independent, she often forged her own path in the male-dominated world of congressional politics. That independence was on display in 1954 when she embarked on an extensive world tour to assess the extent of the Communist threat.

Smith believed that official "codels" (shorthand for "congressional delegations") were too carefully managed and often designed to serve partisan goals rather than the public interest, so she designed her own codel. Hoping to become better informed about foreign affairs and to learn more about the growing influence of the Soviet Union, Smith set her own agenda and asked her own questions. She and a small staff worked with the State Department to plan two separate tours, one in October to visit European countries, and a second in the spring of 1955 to visit nations in Asia and the Middle East.¹¹¹

Smith's travel plans quickly caught the attention of CBS newsman Edward R. Murrow. Sensing strong interest in the lady senator, Murrow asked permission to send along a camera crew. At first, Smith was reluctant. She meant this trip to be personal and unofficial, but in the end, she agreed. As she told Murrow's viewing audience, the camera would allow her to share her experiences and provide Americans with better insight into world affairs. Of course, it was also good publicity in an election year.



Senator Margaret Chase Smith departs on the first leg of her 1954 world tour. Courtesy of the Margaret Chase Smith Library.

Smith visited 23 countries, including Japan, Vietnam, Pakistan, Egypt, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union. She explored farms, hospitals, and factories. She interviewed nearly every major world leader—Britain's Churchill, France's DeGaulle, India's Nehru, Egypt's Nasser, and Spain's Franco. In Taiwan, then known as Formosa, Chinese Nationalist Chiang-Kai Shek sat for an interview, with Madame Chiang serving as interpreter. Of particular interest was the

senator's six-day visit to Moscow and her meeting with Deputy Premiere Vyacheslav Molotov. Everywhere she went, one biographer noted, Smith "looked for evidence of stability, of friendliness to the United States, and of strength and perseverance in the face of Communist aggression."¹¹²

The CBS camera crew filmed it all, then filed weekly reports with Murrow's popular *See It Now* television program. Smith served as special correspondent. A combination of news and travelogues, the reports proved to be very popular. Murrow "made no mistake in turning over [his] program to Senator Margaret Chase Smith," commented the *New York Times*. Especially successful were her on-camera interviews

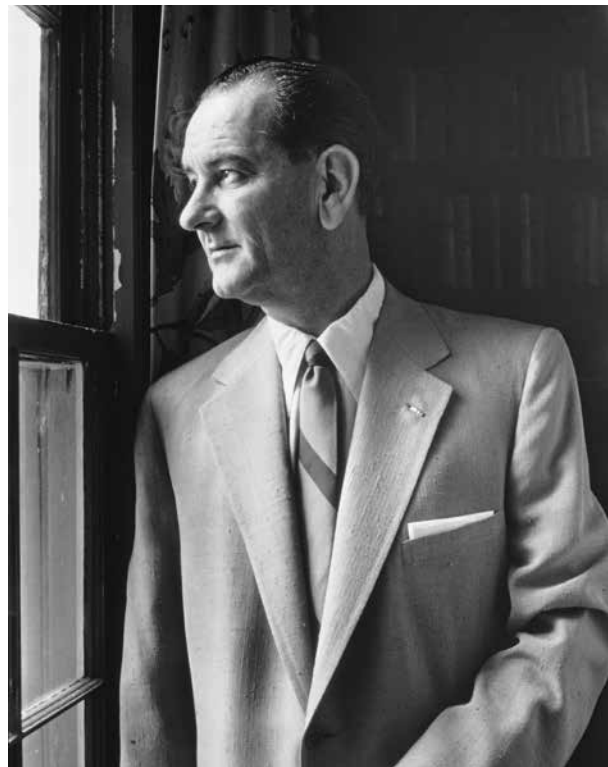
with foreign leaders. "To corral three Chiefs of State on one program is quite a feat," continued the *Times*. "Even seasoned impresarios like . . . Ed Sullivan have never been able to match it."¹¹³

The *See It Now* reports showed Smith to be smart, well-prepared, and completely at ease on camera. They also helped to establish her as a national figure. In 1955, when the Overseas Press Club of America presented the *See It Now* reports with its award for Best Presentation on Foreign Affairs, it was Smith who accepted the award. And so, to a long list of accomplishments for this intrepid senator from Maine, we may add one more—Margaret Chase Smith, award-winning foreign correspondent.¹¹⁴

Lyndon Johnson, Master Manipulator

Lyndon Johnson of Texas, one of the Senate's most powerful majority leaders, was a skilled manipulator. His arm-twisting, lapel-grabbing, finger-poking domination of Senate colleagues was legendary. Johnson called this the power of persuasion; others termed it the Johnson Treatment. It was usually effective, but sometimes the treatment backfired.

In January of 1957, Senator Theodore Green of Rhode Island became chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. This was not unexpected. Green was the senior member with two decades of committee experience. What made Green's chairmanship remarkable was the fact that he was nearly 90 years old. Although respected and hard-working, Green admitted to a few age-related problems. "I can't always hear the witnesses," he complained, "and I can't always read the statements." In hearings, Green's failing eyesight made it difficult for him to distinguish between committee



Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson. Library of Congress.

members. He once turned to the figure seated to his right, identifying him as Mr. Wiley. "My name is Senator Symington," responded the irritated senator from Missouri, Stuart Symington.¹¹⁵

Green's difficulties created a dilemma for Majority Leader Johnson. He needed Green to step down. He wanted second-ranking J. William Fulbright of Arkansas to become chairman but wondered how to accomplish that in an institution ruled by seniority. Furtively, Johnson began manipulating people and

press to maneuver Green out of power. Soon, press reports commented on Green's health problems. As the weeks passed, rumors surfaced hinting at discontent among committee members. Finally, in January 1959, Green informed Johnson that he intended to resign his chairmanship. Problem solved! But Lyndon Johnson, the master manipulator, could not let it rest. It was imperative that Green's resignation be seen as voluntary, not as the result of the Johnson Treatment.¹¹⁶

Assured of Green's intent to resign, Johnson called a meeting of the full committee on January 30, 1959. "I need not tell you that [today is one] of the saddest days I have had," Johnson commented as Green looked on. "I had no choice other than to accept" Senator Green's resignation. One by one, following Johnson's orders, committee members reacted to the news with sadness, then supported what they believed to be a purely symbolic resolution asking Green to remain as chairman. Of course, it was Johnson who iced the cake. He



Senator Theodore Green. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

told the elderly senator that the committee members "voted unanimously to ask you to continue," to which a pleasantly surprised Theodore Green replied, "I didn't know that!" Still confident that Green planned to step down, and certain that the scene would play well in the press, Johnson continued. "They now ask unanimously for you to reconsider." Overwhelmed by this show of support, Green agreed. He would indeed reconsider his decision to resign.

The plan had backfired. A panicked Johnson quickly called for a recess. "Go with him," Johnson whispered to committee clerk Carl Marcy as Green left the room. "Don't let him change his mind!" Johnson then endured a very nervous half hour while committee staff convinced Green to stand by his resignation. "I am deeply touched," Green told his colleagues when he returned to the committee room, "but I still feel that it is my duty . . . to stick by my decision." As one staffer recalled, "Everybody present breathed a sigh of relief." In gratitude, the

committee named Green as chairman emeritus, the first time the Senate used such a title.¹¹⁷

In this case, the so-called master of the Senate nearly out-maneuvered himself, but once again Johnson

got his way. What the future president didn't know, however, was that within just a few short years, his chosen chairman, J. William Fulbright, would become one of his harshest critics on matters of foreign policy.

K7UGA BARRY

Mention the name Barry Goldwater and most Americans think of the 1964 election, when the Arizona senator challenged Lyndon B. Johnson for the presidency. Scholars often recall Goldwater as an independent westerner who helped establish modern conservatism, but if you talk to those who knew Goldwater and worked with him in the Senate, they often remember him as an enthusiastic ham radio operator.

Goldwater loved gadgets. As a child, he hated school and rarely read books, but he never missed an issue of *Popular Mechanics*. He spent endless hours building models and constructed his first crystal radio set before he was 12. He essentially came of age with radio technology, and his love of amateur radio—also known as ham radio—was lifelong. By the time he joined the Senate in 1953, his political star was on the rise, but that did not dampen his childlike enthusiasm for amateur radio. In fact, ham radio operator Barry Goldwater, whose call handle was K7UGA, was an essential part of the man we know as Senator Barry Goldwater.¹¹⁸

In 1963, for example, Goldwater partnered with Sargent Shriver, director of the Peace Corps, to bring second-hand radio gear—donated by hundreds of amateur radio operators—to struggling communities being assisted by Peace Corps volunteers. Shriver suggested starting with Liberia, where there were already 143 Peace Corps volunteers teaching in 51 schools. A

year later, Goldwater joined other senators to sponsor legislation to allow amateur radio enthusiasts to broadcast beyond national borders and worked with the Federal Communications Commission to improve training and licensing of radio operators.¹¹⁹

Whether he was at home in Arizona, at work on Capitol Hill, or traveling around the world, Goldwater was constantly communicating by ham radio. He had a penchant for fast sports cars, one of which he equipped with a portable transmitter and a massive antenna. A reporter was on hand in 1964 as Goldwater hopped into his sports car and drove to his Senate office. Throughout the trip, the reporter noted, Goldwater “twirled dials and knobs and kept up a steady patter of conversation with other ham operators.”¹²⁰

Even in the midst of his 1964 presidential campaign, Goldwater took to the airwaves. “Thru all the confusion of a national political convention,” noted one observer, “Barry Goldwater is still operating a portable ham radio set. Several times each day his identifying salutation goes out over the air.” Over the course of the four-day convention, Goldwater spoke with nearly 100 fellow operators. One day, after calling out his signature “Baker, Able, Robert, Yankee, Barry, [this is] K7UGA,” he got an incredulous reply. “Is this The Barry?” “You guessed it,” Goldwater snapped. “You get the brass ring.” In Goldwater’s run for the White House, ham radio operators were among his most loyal supporters.¹²¹

Goldwater also used his ham radio expertise to help others. During the Vietnam War, he worked closely with military officials, the Military Affiliate Radio System, and ham radio operators at home and abroad to set up a relay system that allowed operators in Vietnam to contact ham radio operators in the United States. They would, in turn, relay calls by telephone from soldiers to their families. “Without any deliberate publicity,” a reporter explained in 1974, “Goldwater for years has lent [his own broadcasting system] to volunteers who have taken short wave messages from Viet Nam and other military bases and relayed them via phone wires to relatives” anxious to hear from their

loved ones serving overseas. Between 1967 and 1974, at least 150,000 such calls were made, many of them from Goldwater’s own broadcasting station.¹²²

In his later years, as Senator Goldwater gained the status of elder statesman, he remained an avid ham radio operator, spending many late-night hours in his specially designed broadcast station in the Russell Senate Office Building. Virginia senator John Warner, who became quite close to Goldwater in his later years, commented that Goldwater often arrived to hearings visibly tired. “There were days in the committee hearings when he’d be yawning,” Warner recalled. “I knew he had spent all night listening to ham radio.”¹²³



Senator Barry Goldwater, right, on his ham radio. Personal and Political Papers of Senator Barry M. Goldwater, Greater Arizona Collection, Arizona State University Library.

The Ev and Charlie Show

In January of 1961, as President Dwight D. Eisenhower relinquished the Oval Office to incoming president John F. Kennedy, Republicans in Congress—outnumbered 64 to 36 in the Senate—wondered how they could maintain their influence in a Democratic administration. To address this issue, Republican leaders in the House and Senate created a joint leadership team. Each week, Republican leaders met behind closed doors. Afterwards, the House and Senate minority leaders held a joint press conference. Officially, this presentation was known as the “Republican Congressional Leadership Statement,” but everyone called it “The Ev and Charlie Show.”

The first “show” took place after a meeting on January 24, 1961, just four days into the Kennedy administration, when Senate Republican Leader Everett Dirksen joined House Republican Leader Charles Halleck, an Indiana representative, to face cameras in the Old Senate Chamber. They repeated the format week after week. At first, the press took a lighthearted view of the events. One reporter compared the two leaders to broken-down Shakespeareans, while another noted that Dirksen and Halleck demonstrated to a whole new generation just “what it was that killed vaudeville.” *New York Times* reporter Tom Wicker mocked it as “The Ev and Charlie Show,” and the label endured.¹²⁴

Such coverage angered Charlie Halleck—“I’m no clown,” he complained—but Everett Dirksen loved the publicity. He embraced the label of “Ev and Charlie” and encouraged reporters to compare them to other “great American duos” like “corned beef and cabbage” and “ham and eggs.” Dirksen was an unlikely television star, but his encyclopedic knowledge and charismatic stage presence served him well.¹²⁵



Senator Everett Dirksen, right, with Representative Charles Halleck.
U.S. Senate Historical Office.

The “Ev and Charlie Show” was a hit. “Every Thursday morning,” reported the *New York Times*, “two of this town’s most agile political performers have been taking a turn on-stage and on-camera.” Networks included excerpts of the show on the evening news, and the team received widespread coverage in daily newspapers, as they discussed issues that ranged from civil rights to Cuban affairs, unemployment to Vietnam. Before long, Dirksen and Halleck were well-known national figures.

By the time the Kennedy administration became the Lyndon B. Johnson administration, the weekly broadcasts were a mainstay in American politics. In 1965 Michigan representative Gerald Ford replaced Halleck as House Republican leader

and the show was renamed the “Ev and Jerry Show.” It continued its regular broadcasts until 1969, when Richard Nixon became president, but the new rendition never quite captured the magic of the original. As it turned out, Charlie Halleck’s irascible nature proved to be the perfect counterpart to Dirksen’s homey demeanor.¹²⁶

For eight years, the show gave Republican leaders a national forum as they tried to find what one contemporary described as that “elusive but important

distinction between opposition and obstruction.” Sometimes criticized, frequently ridiculed, but always informative, Dirksen’s weekly press conferences with his House counterpart reminded the public of the importance of the loyal opposition and the relevance of a minority voice. In fact, Dirksen’s influence usually matched and sometimes surpassed that of majority-party senators, because—as so many of his colleagues understood—Dirksen was always the star of the show.¹²⁷

Mr. Marigold

Everett Dirksen of Illinois—just mention the name and so many things come to mind. There’s his long congressional career. Elected to the House in 1932, he served eight terms before retiring for health reasons in 1948. Two years later, health restored, he toppled the Senate’s majority leader to win a Senate seat. Rising to the position of Republican leader in 1959, Dirksen remained in the Senate until his death a decade later.

There’s Dirksen the master legislator and skilled orator. As minority leader, Dirksen influenced every major bill from civil rights to arms control and shaped numerous debates on the Senate floor. “Very few senators admit to changing their votes as a result of a colleague’s speech,” one scholar explained, but more than once Dirksen’s “remarks altered the moral and philosophical language of the debate.”¹²⁸

Dirksen had a remarkable talent for building coalitions. Hidden away in his Capitol Hill office was the Twilight Lodge, a bipartisan, fully stocked bar that opened every day at five o’clock. Just to make sure the Twilight Lodge was available whenever it was needed, Dirksen replaced all the numbers on the clock with

the number 5. “Make no mistake,” his biographer cautioned, “important, albeit informal, business was carried out in the Twilight Lodge.”¹²⁹

These are all important elements of Dirksen’s career, but there is an equally characteristic if less consequential aspect of Dirksen’s personality—his tireless dedication to the marigold. Every year, as regular as the coming of spring, Dirksen introduced legislation to name the marigold as the national flower. The “marigold is as sprightly as the daffodil,” he told his colleagues. It is “as colorful as the rose . . . as resolute as the zinnia . . . as delicate as the carnation . . . as haughty as the chrysanthemum . . . as aggressive as the petunia . . . as ubiquitous as the violet . . . and as stately as the snapdragon.”¹³⁰

Despite Dirksen’s good-natured eloquence, his annual proposal faced opposition stiffer than a dried-out sunflower. The marigold is “un-American,” stated Vermont senator George Aiken, who noted that the flower originated in Mexico, not the United States, and stated his preference for the violet. Some rejected the marigold for its harsh color or its bad odor. It “smells like goat meat,” complained one critic. Every

year, Margaret Chase Smith debated Dirksen on the comparative value of the marigold and her favorite, the red rose. Dirksen lost this perennial legislative battle. Each year, his resolution went down to defeat, as one reporter quipped, “deader than an unwatered marigold.”¹³¹

The Illinois senator also was a notorious jokester. “Dirksen was marvelously over-blown,” remarked journalist David Halberstam, “like a huge and rich vegetable that has become slightly overripe; watching him, one had the sense that he was always winking at the audience.” And yet, the witticisms of “Mr. Marigold” often masked a more serious intent. “Sometimes when the Senate was bogged down, or its members suffer[ed] from fatigue, with tempers flaring,” explained a biographer, “Ev would rise and give one of his patented marigold speeches. The galleries would fill [and] good humor would be restored.”¹³²

When Dirksen died in 1969, obituaries chronicled his legislative accomplishments, but many of his colleagues knew that the legislative victory he cherished most was the one he never achieved.



Senators Everett Dirksen and Margaret Chase Smith share their favorite flowers. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

After hearing of the death of her old friend, Margaret Chase Smith placed a single golden flower on his desk and offered this simple eulogy: “He loved his marigolds.”¹³³

Battle of the Octogenarians

“Government agencies are frantically going broke,” reported the *Washington Post* in June of 1962, “[because the Dean of the Senate . . . and the Deputy Dean of the House . . . keep yelling at each other.” Those two members—chairmen of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees—delayed action on spending bills for months while they and their colleagues argued over seemingly petty issues. The chairmen “are behaving like a couple of kids taunting each other to cross a

chalk line with howls of ‘You don’t come to my place, I don’t go to yours!’” The press dubbed it the “Battle of the Octogenarians,” but underlying this crisis was a dispute as old as Congress itself.¹³⁴

There are perennial tensions between the Senate and the House of Representatives, but this fight erupted with unusual force in 1962, fueled by a deep-seated House resentment of Senate prerogatives. For nearly two centuries, conference committees were chaired by senators, and such meetings were always

held on the Senate side of the Capitol. As the annual debate over spending bills began in 1962, the House challenged such customs of senatorial preference. Leading the charge for the frustrated House was 83-year-old Clarence Cannon of Missouri. A former House parliamentarian (who compiled the voluminous *Cannon's Precedents*), he had served in the House since 1923. On the Senate side of the argument was 84-year-old Carl Hayden of Arizona, the Senate's president pro tempore with 50 years of congressional service behind him. His skillful management of appropriations bills had earned him the label, "the third senator from every state."¹³⁵

Hayden and Cannon had been friends for years, but in 1962 this venerable pair began feuding as each voiced the demands of their colleagues. Cannon informed Hayden that he would not make the trek to the Senate side of the Hill for conference meetings. In future, he insisted, senators had to walk to the House side at least half of the time. Furthermore, he demanded that he be allowed to chair half of the conferences. Adding fuel to the fire, Cannon and his House allies accused senators of being spend-thrifts and complained of the Senate's annoying habit of increasing the size of appropriations already approved by the House. Hayden countered. From then on, he said, the Senate would initiate half of all appropriations bills. This brought forth cries of "unconstitutional" from representatives, since the Constitution expressly gives to the House the power of the purse.

The resulting stalemate lasted for months, with members from both houses of Congress standing firm. "The Senate refuses to become Cannon fodder," insisted Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen. Meeting after meeting produced no agreement. The appropriations process remained stalled well past the end of the fiscal year, while government agencies scrambled for funds. Finally, Carl Hayden called for



Senator Carl Hayden. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

a truce. He suggested a special meeting of committee members to be held on neutral ground. Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield offered EF-100, a small conference room in the exact center of the Capitol. "I even agreed to have it surveyed," Mansfield explained, "so that the conference table would not be so much as an eighth of an inch more on one side than the other." Cannon agreed to meet but stood firm in his demands. To end the crisis, Carl Hayden relented. The Senate sacrificed a few of its cherished privileges, at least for that session. It gained no ground in initiating appropriations, but government operations returned to normal.¹³⁶

Pundits and cartoonists dismissed the battle as a tempest in a teapot, but more astute observers recognized that this well-publicized "battle of octogenarians" was another chapter in the ongoing struggle over the shared constitutional powers of the Senate and the House.¹³⁷

The Last Senate Duel

The Senate can be a tense working environment, and heated debates occasionally disrupt its stately, dignified proceedings. Senatorial disputes have ended in fistfights in the Chamber and wrestling matches in the corridor. In the 19th century, senators sometimes took their arguments outside, to be settled with pistols on the dueling ground. Of course, by the 20th century duels were a thing of the past—well, almost! In 1967 senators fought one last duel.

Like most duels, it began with an insult. “Can it be that our [Republican] friends . . . are too old to play

tennis?” asked Senator Joseph Clark of Pennsylvania, a Democrat. “Can it be that they hobble around a 9-hole golf course . . . leaving [tennis] to the party of youth and vigor?” Clark’s query was prompted by a *Washingtonian* magazine article that listed the capital’s best tennis players, including seven senators—six Democrats and one Republican. Claiborne Pell, Birch Bayh, Robert and Edward Kennedy, Joseph Tydings, and Joe Clark made up the Democratic list. The lone Republican was Jacob Javits. Drawing attention to the list’s lopsided partisan balance, Clark challenged Republican senators to a showdown.



Media cover the tennis match between Senate Republicans and Democrats, September 27, 1967. (L–R) Senators Joseph Tydings, Walter Mondale, Edward Brooke, and Howard Baker. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

The reply to Clark's dare came from a Republican freshman, the junior senator from Tennessee, Howard Baker. In office just three months, Baker had not yet delivered his maiden speech, but as he told the Senate, "There comes a time when men can remain silent no longer." Baker disputed Clark's assessment of the two parties. He regarded the Democratic Party as "the guardian of the status quo" and "the exponent of tired old theories." In the "name of my party, with our honor at stake," Baker proclaimed, "we accept the challenge and stand ready for the match." In a bow to tradition, however, Baker insisted that the match be carried out "according to the time-honored rules of dueling."

The elaborate ritual of dueling requires the appointment of "seconds," those trusted sidekicks who make the arrangements, find the proper venue, and carry the weapons. In the Senate, of course, this job fell to each senator's legislative assistant. Typically, a doctor would stand by, but there were no physicians in the Senate at the time. Instead, Tennessee's senior senator, Albert Gore, offered to bring along a "bottle of camphor" and a supply of his state's favorite "old-time liniment," a beverage particularly well known for its medicinal qualities.¹³⁸

At five o'clock in the afternoon of September 27, 1967, 12 senators took to the courts dressed

in regulation tennis shorts and shoes (although, as one observer noted, some of the shoes looked "embarrassingly new and unused"). Playing for the Democrats: Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island, Ernest "Fritz" Hollings of South Carolina, Walter Mondale of Minnesota, Joseph Tydings of Maryland, William Spong of Virginia, and team captain Joseph Clark. On the Republican team: captain Howard Baker, Edward Brooke of Massachusetts, Charles Percy of Illinois, Peter Dominick of Colorado, Jacob Javits of New York, and Strom Thurmond of South Carolina. The umpire was *Washington Post* columnist Art Buchwald.¹³⁹

As the battle began, Baker and Brooke easily put away Mondale and Tydings, 6 to 4, and Republicans took the lead. Democrats Clark and Pell then clobbered Percy and Thurmond, 8 to 1, prompting Thurmond to remark: "I would have done better at pushups." With the score tied at one match each, Javits and Dominick surged to a 2 to 0 lead against Hollings and Spong, but the advantage didn't hold. Republicans lost the third match, 6 to 3.¹⁴⁰

The duel ended with a Democratic victory, but the real champion was Howard Baker. The young Tennessee freshman proved to be a skilled duelist—quite prepared to take on even the most unique of Senate challenges.¹⁴¹



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CHAPTER 6

The Senate and the Capitol



Washington's Tomb

As Capitol visitors walk through the beautiful and spacious Rotunda that sits directly beneath the Capitol dome, they often feel compelled to look up—to view the Apotheosis of Washington, a masterwork of fresco painting by Italian-American artist Constantino Brumidi. Decorating the ceiling of the Rotunda, the massive depiction of the deification of George Washington is truly a sight to behold, but visitors to the Rotunda should also look down—at the floor. Around the center stone of the floor are about a dozen small, square indentations. Few people notice them, and tour guides rarely mention them, but they are a remnant of an interesting chapter in Capitol history.

When George Washington died in 1799, Congress gained permission from his widow to have the remains of the first president reinterred in a proposed Capitol mausoleum. This action would serve as a lasting tribute to Washington's role in the building of the Capitol, which had just gotten underway at the time of his death. As construction continued over the next three decades, there was always a plan to include a resting place for the founding father.

Delayed by funding issues, war, and the disastrous raid by British soldiers in 1814, work on the Capitol's central portion finally began in 1818. The cellar came first, where a central vault was built to serve as Washington's tomb. Directly above, builders



The Crypt, directly above the planned tomb for George Washington. Architect of the Capitol.

constructed a circular chamber that became known as “the Crypt.” The Rotunda came next, and in 1826 artist John Trumbull adorned that space with his four large paintings commemorating the American Revolution. From the apex of the completed dome, which was much smaller than today’s tall cast-iron dome, a skylight allowed sunlight to pour into the Rotunda. A large opening in the Rotunda floor allowed light to penetrate down into the Crypt, where a planned cenotaph would mark the spot under which would rest Washington’s mortal remains. To protect visitors from falling through the hole and into the Crypt, a wrought-iron railing encircled the opening in the Rotunda floor. It was a beautiful plan. The only thing missing was George Washington!

As the building neared completion in the late 1820s, Congress attempted to bring the first president back to the Capitol. Unfortunately, Martha Washington had died in 1802, long before the building was finished, and Mount Vernon’s new owner refused to comply. George Washington remained in his handsome tomb at Mount Vernon. Meanwhile, Trumbull’s paintings began showing signs of decay, due in part to damp air circulating up through that hole in the Rotunda floor. The artist agreed to restore the paintings—if the hole in the floor was closed. In 1828, to protect the paintings,

Congress ordered the hole sealed, and the protective wrought-iron railing was removed. That would seem quite final, but not everyone gave up on the plan for Washington’s Capitol tomb.

In 1832 a new proposal surfaced, this time to bring both George and Martha Washington to the Capitol to lie in eternal rest, side by side, beneath the Capitol dome. Proponents of the plan argued that the mere presence of Washington’s body would be beneficial. Washington’s “sage advice [will] reoccur to our minds to heal all our political bickering,” predicted one man, “and [will] make us like a band of brothers, united in love, and determined to preserve the interests of the Union.” This proposal also failed, and that’s probably for the best. After all, as a later visitor to the Capitol tomb noted, “Who would change the sunshine and sweet air of Mount Vernon for this gloomy vault” in the Capitol cellar?¹

Thus, the plan for Washington’s Capitol tomb was never realized, but remnants of it can still be found. The tomb remains, and it’s still empty. The Crypt retains its name, although it never served as a burial chamber. And there are those marks on the Rotunda floor, small indentations left behind by the removal of the circular wrought-iron railing designed to keep visitors safe as they gazed down upon the never-occupied tomb of George Washington.²

Behind the Capitol’s Littlest Doors

Throughout the Senate wing of the Capitol, there are a number of small doors, measuring about two feet in height, tucked away along the baseboards of long corridors. Few people notice them, and fewer still know what they hide, but those doors provide evidence of an important and innovative era of Capitol history.

The story begins with a disaster. On Christmas Eve in 1851, a Capitol guard spotted an unusual flickering of light through the windows of the Library of Congress, then located along the west front of the Capitol. The diligent guard alerted his colleagues before breaking down the library’s locked door to find a small fire burning. Quickly, he sounded the alarm

and then raced down the stairs to the nearest water source. By the time he returned with his splashing bucket, however, the fire had spread throughout the two-story library.

Caused by a spark that escaped the nearby flue of a fireplace, the raging fire required multiple fire engines and the dedicated effort of dozens of volunteers to douse the flames. Two-thirds of the books were destroyed, including most of the unique collection purchased from Thomas Jefferson in 1815 (ironically, to replace books lost to an earlier fire). Five Gilbert Stuart portraits had adorned the walls—now just ashes. When the last embers were finally

extinguished a day later, all that remained was a burnt-out shell.³

In 1851 Washington's water supply came from a primitive network of springs and wells dating back to the 1830s, feeding water through wooden troughs or cast iron tubes to large tanks or reservoirs outside various government buildings. In some cases, that water was then carried through a pipe to an inside fountain or spout. Unfortunately, both the availability and the pressure of the water supply needed to fight flames was inadequate, and many buildings fell victim to fire. The devastating loss of the library in 1851 prompted Congress finally to take action. Within months, it



Capitol corridor with tiny door visible on the far wall, 1867. Architect of the Capitol.

authorized a study and then funded construction of a new aqueduct that would carry to the Capitol “an unfailing and abundant supply of good and wholesome water” from the Great Falls of the Potomac 18 miles away.⁴

To oversee this ambitious project, the government turned to Captain Montgomery C. Meigs, the army engineer who would soon manage construction of the Capitol extensions. Over a 10-year period, Meigs and the Army Corps of Engineers built a dam, 11 tunnels, six bridges, and two reservoirs, along with pump stations, gate houses, and pipelines. Despite multiple funding delays, the hazards of weather, and even the advent of war, Meigs and his team brought running water to the Capitol.⁵

The completion of the Washington Aqueduct benefitted the Capitol first but soon transformed the entire city. Firefighting took a giant step forward, and life in general became a lot easier. In the Capitol, cooks, janitors, and workers took advantage of this latest technology, and water poured into large marble bathtubs tucked away in the basement where senators soothed away their aches and pains.

That brings us back to those little doors, which hide something as mundane as a rusty old water faucet and drain—commonplace today, but state of the art technology in the 1850s, made possible by the new aqueduct. If that faucet had been there in 1851, the Capitol guard might have been able to douse that little fire before it consumed an irreplaceable library.

Freedom's Journey

On December 2, 1863, workers installed the final section of the Statue of Freedom atop the Capitol dome. “Freedom now stands,” commented one official, “may she stand there forever, not only in form, but in spirit.” In a nation torn apart by civil war, the image of Lady Freedom became a welcome symbol of hope and unity.⁶

In 1855 Architect of the Capitol Thomas U. Walter and engineer Montgomery C. Meigs had contracted noted American sculptor Thomas G. Crawford to produce an allegorical representation of Liberty to crown the Capitol’s new cast-iron dome. “We have too many Washingtons,” Meigs wrote to Crawford, adding also that classical designs depicting “America” or “Victory” were considered too pagan. “Liberty,” he concluded, “is the best we can get.”⁷

Working in a studio in Italy, Crawford designed a statue titled “Armed Freedom.” It featured a classical figure wearing a liberty cap, a Greek symbol popularized

during the French Revolution. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, whose department oversaw the Capitol expansion of the 1850s and ’60s, objected. The cap’s history, he argued, “renders it inappropriate to a people who were born free”—obviously ignoring the large enslaved population in the United States. Instead, Davis suggested a helmet. Crawford altered his design to present Freedom adorned with a Romanesque helmet crested with eagle feathers, which Davis approved. The sculptor crafted the larger-than-life figure in clay, then cast a plaster model in five separate sections. Each piece was carefully packed into a separate crate, and in April of 1858 the crates were loaded on a ship bound for the United States.⁸

Freedom’s journey to America proved to be long and hazardous. The small cargo ship developed leaks, forcing a delay of several weeks at Gibraltar. When the journey resumed, violent storms caused even more damage, prompting the captain to order all heavy cargo dumped overboard except for the precious



The Statue of Freedom, soon after placement on the Capitol dome, 1863. Architect of the Capitol.

crates carrying Freedom. After several tempestuous months at sea, the ship limped into harbor at Bermuda. There, the voyage was abandoned, the vessel was condemned, and the crates holding the plaster model were stored. It took months, but one by one the crates were shipped to Washington. Finally, in March of 1859, Freedom's pieces were reunited.⁹

When the last crate arrived, the Clark Mills foundry began casting the colossal statue in bronze. To accomplish this challenging task, the foundry turned to an enslaved African American named Philip Reid, who skillfully devised a method of casting and assembling the individual sections. Not lost on anyone was the irony of an enslaved man supervising the assembly of Freedom. "Was there a prophecy in that moment when the slave became the artist,"

questioned one contemporary, "and with rare poetic justice, reconstructed the beautiful symbol of freedom for America?" More poignant still, by the time Reid saw the final section hoisted into place on December 2, 1863, he was a free man, thanks to the Compensated Emancipation Act of 1862.¹⁰

A 35-gun-salute punctuated the ceremony that day—one gun for each state, including those of the Confederacy. Except for a brief restoration period in 1993, Freedom has remained on her perch for nearly 160 years. Her twin—Crawford's plaster model, long neglected and shuffled from place to place—found a permanent home in 2008. Appropriately, she now watches over Emancipation Hall in the underground Capitol Visitor Center. Together they stand, one below, one atop the dome, reminding us that freedom's journey is never easy.¹¹

Mystery of the Senate Bathtubs

In 1936 the Capitol basement took on the atmosphere of an archaeological dig. On August 17, workers uncovered two artifacts better suited to the Senate of ancient Rome than to its modern American counterpart. Large, marble, and dusty, these strange objects aroused much curiosity. “Old, sunken marble bathtubs down in the caverns of the Capitol—sorely in need of a good scrubbing—have revived something of a major mystery,” noted an Associated Press reporter. “What about those bathtubs?” another reporter asked Capitol Architect David Lynn. “What about what bathtubs?” Lynn responded. “I’ve been here over 40 years,” Capitol engineer Arthur Cook told reporters, “and I’ve never been able to find out anything about [the tubs] . . . It’s just one of those unsolvable mysteries.”¹²

Five days later, 71-year-old Abraham Lincoln Goodall solved the mystery. Employed in the Senate Folding Room in the 1880s, Goodall’s career included an opportunity to bathe in a Senate tub. “I was only

a boy at the time,” he remarked, “and I was mighty pleased when the president pro tem . . . gave me a pass to the baths.” Recalling the heyday of the Senate baths, Goodall described the rare privilege of soaking in a tub supplied with hot water. “That was before the bathtub had come into general use,” he explained, “and those sunken marble [tubs] seemed pretty fine.” With Goodall’s assistance, reporters pieced together the history of the tubs.¹³

In 1858, as the Capitol’s new Senate wing neared completion, Senator James Pearce of Maryland informed engineer Montgomery Meigs that “he and thirteen other Senators think it desirable that . . . a few bathing tubs should be provided.” At the time, most senators lived in boarding houses, where bathing facilities were primitive at best. The nearly completed Washington Aqueduct, which would supply water to the District of Columbia from the Great Falls of the Potomac, promised to improve living standards by bringing running water to homes and businesses.

One of the first beneficiaries of the new technology would be the U.S. Capitol—and its commodious tubs. Meigs ordered six large tubs of Italian Carrara marble. He installed them in a room in the basement of the Senate’s new wing, decorated with colorful floor tiles, ornamental plaster, and walnut panels that offered privacy to bathers. The Senate purchased towels, sponges, and soap, hired attendants, and by 1860 the baths were in operation.¹⁴



One of the original Senate bathtubs. Architect of the Capitol.

The baths quickly became a place to relax, socialize, and even prepare for a major speech. In 1888 the *Washington Evening Star* explained that senators “write the speech, commit it to memory, take a bath, and then deliver it!” A generous senator also shared the luxury. After giving a constituent a tour of the Capitol, as a special honor the senator invited him to take a bath. A House member once made the mistake of offering this perk to a lady visitor. “Won’t you go down and take a

bath?” the representative asked. Indignant, the woman fled the building.¹⁵

By the 1890s, most senators occupied homes with up-to-date plumbing, and the Senate baths fell into disrepair. Eventually, four tubs were removed. The two that still remain were buried behind temporary walls and mechanical equipment—forgotten—until 1936, when workers excavated the site and stirred up the Mystery of the Senate Bathtubs.

Senator James McMillan and the National Mall

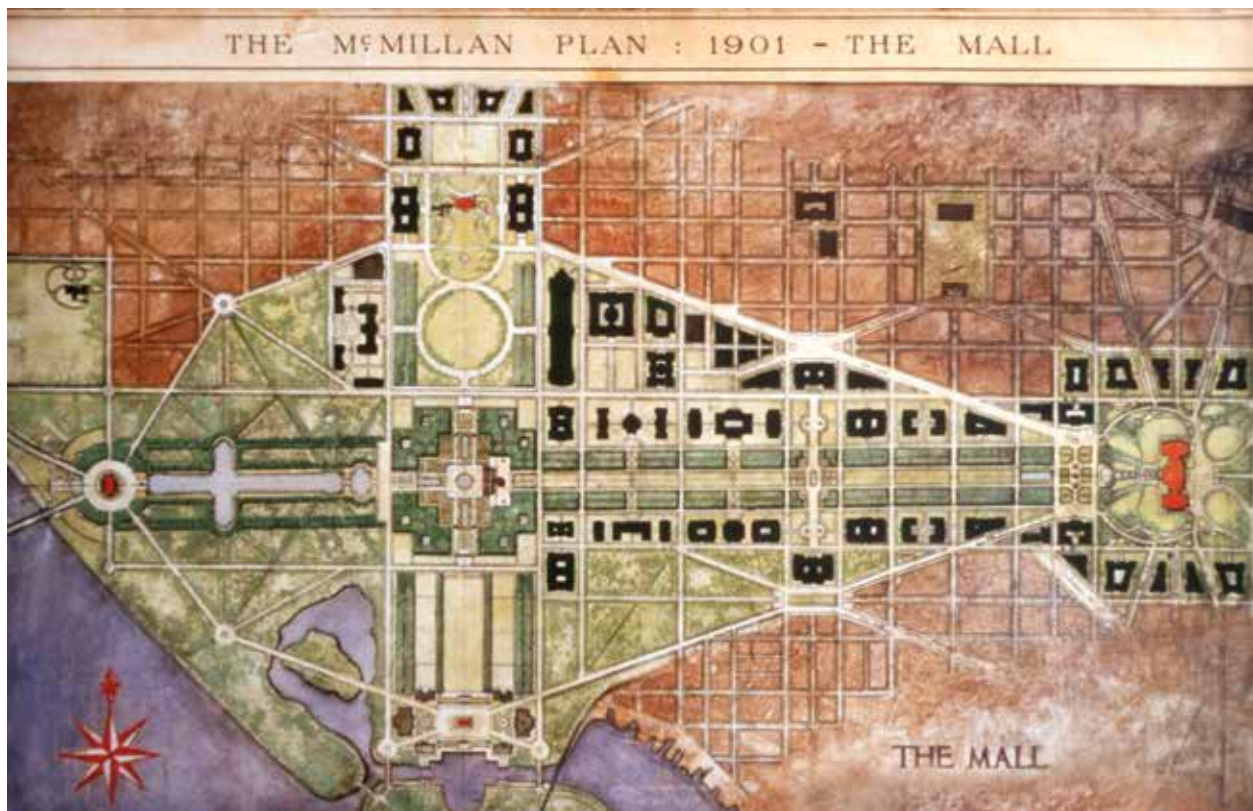
In 1855 17-year-old James McMillan moved from his native Canada to Detroit. He clerked in a hardware store, then became a purchasing agent for the Detroit and Milwaukee Railroad. It was a modest beginning, followed by a noteworthy career.

As civil war engulfed the nation in the early 1860s, McMillan established the Michigan Car Company and became the principal supplier of railroad cars to the Union army. Within a decade, that enterprise grew to include nearly every aspect of the burgeoning transportation industry. McMillan parts helped complete the transcontinental railroad in 1869. McMillan rail lines brought commercial development to once isolated communities. By 1880 James McMillan was a multi-millionaire. “It is fair to say,” commented one observer, “that no man in the history of Detroit . . . caused more day’s wages to be paid, more millions of products to be fabricated, or more workmen’s homes to be reared, than James McMillan.”¹⁶

McMillan’s success coincided with the rise of the Republican Party. He joined Michigan’s Republican State Committee in 1876. Within a few years,



Senator James McMillan. Library of Congress.



"The McMillan Plan for the National Mall, 1901." National Capital Planning Commission.

he controlled the statewide patronage system and took advantage of rivalry among party leaders to seize command of the state's Republican machine—by the 1880s known as the McMillan Alliance. He remained Michigan's party boss for the rest of his life. In 1889 he walked into a seat in the United States Senate.¹⁷

Upon arrival in Washington, the political boss founded the "School of Philosophy Club," a gathering of powerful senators who met at McMillan's home to fine-tune the Senate's legislative agenda. He supported the gold standard and promoted federal funding for Great Lakes shipping. He also chaired the Committee on the District of Columbia. Although this position often was derided by senators, McMillan used his chairmanship to instigate a far-sighted plan to beautify the nation's capital.¹⁸

In 1900, as Washington approached its centennial as the seat of government, McMillan created

the Senate Park Commission—better known as the McMillan Commission. He worked with noted architect Daniel Burnham and landscape designer Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., to produce a design that would remain true to Pierre L'Enfant's 1791 vision, while simultaneously reshaping the heart of the capital city into a modern showplace.¹⁹

The commission unveiled its plan to an excited crowd in January 1902. The scaled model showed an extensive park that stretched from the Capitol to the Potomac. Stately museums faced each other across a wide lawn. A new monument to Abraham Lincoln anchored the western end, connected by a long reflecting pool to the Washington monument. A decorative memorial bridge spanned the river to Arlington. An elegant railway depot, now Union Station, consolidated rail lines. It was an ambitious plan to create a common, national space. With this plan, McMillan envisioned the grand design of

a National Mall so associated with Washington, D.C., today.²⁰

Unfortunately, James McMillan did not live to see his plan implemented. He died unexpectedly in August of 1902, but his commission lived on, and

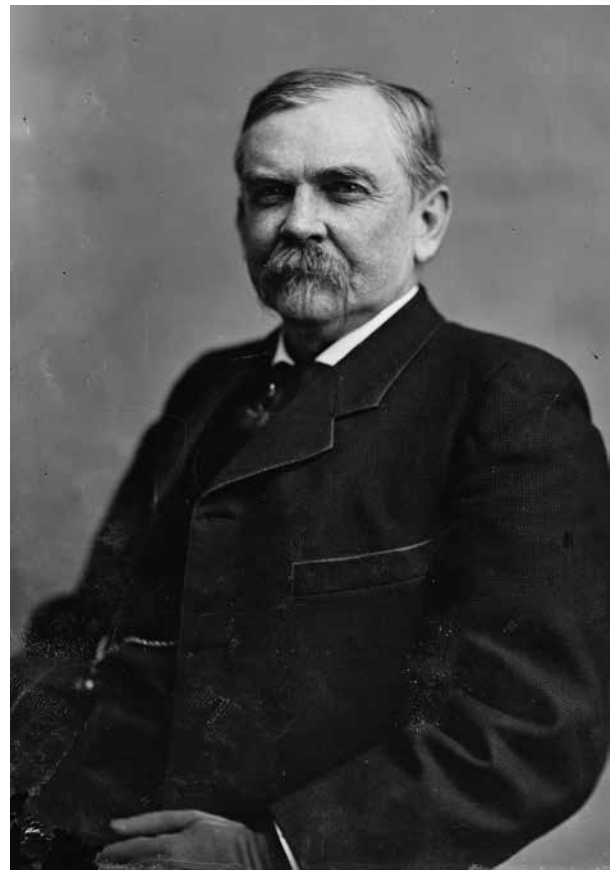
his successful proposal became a model for future city planners. McMillan may be a forgotten figure today, but an important part of his life story—the National Mall—remains as a constant reminder of his influence.²¹

The Senate Cottage

Senator George Vest of Missouri called it his “little castle.” Architect of the Capitol Elliott Woods made it into an oasis of science. Sergeant at Arms Daniel Ransdell nicknamed it “the shack.” Part of a hodgepodge collection of buildings gradually acquired for the Capitol after the Civil War, this unpretentious little building, which stood at the northwest corner of Delaware and C Street, N.E., in Washington, D.C., is now gone, but the “Senate Cottage” was once a Capitol Hill landmark.

Throughout the latter half of the 19th century, the federal government acquired more than 200 acres of land surrounding the Capitol—land dotted with businesses, homes, and remnants of old estates—in an ongoing effort to expand and beautify the Capitol grounds. The Senate acquired parcel No. 683 in 1874 and built horse stables there, alongside an existing humble little cottage that provided some extra storage space.²²

When Senator Vest arrived on Capitol Hill in 1879, there were no Senate office buildings, and only committee chairmen had office space in the Capitol. Quickly realizing the value of this cottage and its location, Vest equipped the small house as an office, complete with desk, books, and a well-stocked humidor. A respected senator known for his strong support of Yellowstone National Park and for a fabled speech he called “Eulogy of the Dog,” Vest often escaped to his “little castle,”



Senator George Vest. Library of Congress.

seeking refuge from the busy Capitol. There, he gained a few moments of quiet relaxation or met with friends and colleagues. In other words, the cottage became one of the Senate’s first “hideaway” offices.²³

When Vest left office in 1903, the Senate Cottage might have fallen into ruin except for the boundless

energy and unusual hobbies of Architect of the Capitol Elliott Woods. Known as the busiest man in Washington, Woods never took a vacation. He oversaw complex building projects, including what became the Russell Senate Office Building. He pursued such an eclectic set of hobbies that he became something of a Washington celebrity. By 1905 visitors to the cottage might find Woods practicing his violin or composing a comic opera. More likely, however, they would find him deeply involved in his latest scientific endeavor. Woods converted part of the cottage into a well-equipped laboratory where he carried out experiments in telegraphy and x-ray technology.²⁴

Following Woods, Sergeant at Arms Daniel Ransdell took possession of the Senate Cottage. He brought in extra tables and hosted card parties,

attended by senators and other members of the Washington elite. When Charles Higgins became sergeant at arms in 1913, he made more practical use of the four-room house—he lived in it. By that time, however, the cottage was doomed. A 1910 law authorized the development of the surrounding land to provide “a dignified and adequate approach to the Capitol” from Union Station. The cottage stood in the way of progress, marring the landscape of what is now known as the Russell Senate Park. “Many an old resident will miss the quaint one-story building” lamented the *Washington Post*. No doubt that was true, but no one loved the little cottage quite as much as Senator Vest. Thankfully, Vest died in 1904 and was not present to witness the destruction of his cherished Senate hideaway.²⁵



The Senate Cottage. Architect of the Capitol.

Senate Hideaways

Hideaway offices are among the Senate's best-kept secrets. "They are the Senate's *sancta sanctorum*," noted a reporter in 1989, "where lawmakers have been able to retreat to conduct business"—sometimes "monkey business." A few of the secret spaces date back to the 19th century, but most are more modern creations. In the 1970s, about 40 senators enjoyed a hideaway. That number grew to 77 by 1989. Today, every senator has a private office tucked away in some corner of the U.S. Capitol.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, there were few private rooms available in the Capitol. Apparently Daniel Webster had one, but most senators enjoyed private offices only if they chaired a committee. In

such cases, the committee room also served as the chair's office. Not surprisingly, by the early 20th century, there were a lot of committees. In 1906 the Senate had 66 standing committees. That number grew to 80 by 1920, and many of them were "sinecure" committees that rarely met, never held hearings, and existed solely to provide office space to the committee chair. In 1921 the Senate reformed its committee system and eliminated most of the sinecures, sending senators hunting for new office space.

When the Senate's first office building (today's Russell Senate Office Building) opened in 1909, providing offices for senators and staff and opening up spaces in the Capitol, the idea of hideaways took off.



Senator Claiborne Pell's hideaway office in the Capitol, 1996. CQ Roll Call Photograph Collection, Library of Congress.

As the Senate complex expanded (the Dirksen Senate Office Building opened in 1958, followed by the Hart Senate Office Building in 1983), more Capitol spaces were converted to hideaways. Completion of the Capitol Visitor Center in 2009, again freeing up Capitol space that had been used by employees, allowed all 100 senators to get a hideaway. Some even got two or three. When it comes to Capitol land-grabbing, no one will ever surpass Lyndon Johnson. As majority leader, Johnson occupied several hideaways, along with a grand leadership suite. He had so many rooms, in fact, that they collectively became known as the “Johnson Ranch East.”

Despite the popularity of hideaways, not every senator was a fan. Wisconsin’s William Proxmire, long-time critic of waste in government expenditures, condemned the practice. “The worst aspect of this whole wasteful situation,” he complained in 1961, “is the sorry example of extravagance the country’s legislative body is setting by pampering itself . . . [with] the most expensive offices ever constructed in Washington.”²⁶

Today, very senior senators typically occupy lovely historic chambers with dramatic views, while junior senators are forced to settle for basement cubbyholes once occupied by clerks, committee staff, or perhaps a broom. The Senate Committee on Rules and Administration assigns hideaway spaces through a carefully

calculated seniority system, but in earlier years Senate majority leaders awarded these little retreats in return for political favors. Johnson reportedly “used hideaways to reward the faithful and punish the recalcitrant.” If your hideaway was a windowless room in the basement, “where the walls sweated all day,” explained a Senate aide, “you had a pretty good idea where you stood with LBJ.” In 1962 Johnson gifted prized hideaway spaces to the Senate’s two female members, Maine’s Margaret Chase Smith and Maurine Neuberger of Oregon, despite their lower seniority.²⁷

Regardless of their size or location, hideaways have provided a quiet haven for senators, a space away from reporters and constituents. Of course, some have been put to more colorful uses. The Senate’s bootlegger, George Cassiday (better known as the “Man in the Green Hat”), borrowed a few during Prohibition to stash his supply of bourbon and bathtub gin. In the 1960s, Louisiana senator Allen Ellender used his large, elaborate hideaway, equipped with a full kitchen, to host “hideaway housewarmings” and serve his family recipe for Louisiana Gumbo. Evening hideaway discussions, fueled by well-stocked bars, became a Senate mainstay of the 20th century. At least one hideaway has been reported to be haunted—by Daniel Webster, no less! Small or large, fancy or plain, hideaways remain as the Senate’s *sancta sanctorum*.²⁸

The Senate Subway

When the first Senate office building (now the Russell Senate Office Building) opened in 1909, senators and staff began spending more time in their offices and less time in the Capitol. This raised concerns. How could senators be informed about Chamber action, or more

important, would senators be able to get to the Chamber in time to respond to a roll-call vote?

To address such concerns, the architectural team of Carrère and Hastings, designers of the Senate office building, proposed an underground electric rail line to connect the office building to the Capitol.

That plan was scratched when some charged that Congress would be “enervated by luxury,” but the Senate did appropriate funds for construction of a tunnel. Other ambitious proposals soon appeared. A moving sidewalk could carry busy senators to the Capitol, or a line of moving chairs might transport senators along a track. Neither idea seemed particularly safe or efficient.²⁹

The solution came from Capitol Architect Elliott Woods. On his recommendation, the Senate purchased two yellow, battery-operated Studebakers. Each car could hold eight people and typically ran at a speed of four miles per hour. Senators enjoyed this early foray into the automobile age and fondly dubbed the two cars “Tommy” and “Peg.” But, alas, in an era of technological progress, Tommy and Peg were soon hopelessly out of date.

In 1912 the two cars were replaced by a monorail system, a single car powered by an overhead electric

line. Three years later, that system was replaced by two new monorail cars, each holding up to 18 people, that shuttled back and forth along parallel tracks. This futuristic system traveled at a speedy eight miles per hour and stayed in operation for the next 50 years. Reporters called it the “world’s shortest subway.” Senators compared it to the little train in the Toonerville Folks comic strip and nicknamed the subway the “Toonerville Trolley.”

Construction of a second office building (now the Dirksen Senate Office Building) in the 1950s required an expansion of the subway, and by 1961 two separate tunnels connected the buildings to the Capitol. Sleek, new electric trains ran along parallel tracks at a breathtaking 14 miles per hour. (One operator once pushed it to 20 mph!) The Senate chaplain christened the new cars the “Swift Chariots of Democracy,” and some people found the short ride quite exhilarating. When the two cars raced

into the Capitol side by side, a reporter noted, it was almost as thrilling as the famous chariot race in the movie *Ben Hur*.³⁰

Of course, even speed and excitement have their critics. Arkansas senator J. William Fulbright stated in 1961 that he preferred the old trolley system, which he found “soothing to jangled nerves.” The new subway, he declared, was “vulgar,” and he blamed it for the “irritable, testy, [and] acrimonious atmosphere prevailing in the Senate.” If that wasn’t bad enough,



Early Senate subway car. Architect of the Capitol.

Fulbright complained that a ride on the speeding subway would mess up even the best-kept hairstyle. Despite such complaints, the Senate subway continued to operate and was further expanded in the 1990s with a fully automated system that travels all the way to the Hart Senate Office Building, the newest of the three buildings. Today, a ride on the Senate subway remains a frequent necessity for senators and a popular activity for visitors and constituents.³¹



Modern Senate subway. Architect of the Capitol.

The Marble Room

“Famous Marble Room to Become Retreat for Senators,” declared a headline in the *Washington Evening Star* in 1921, announcing a decision by the Senate to designate this beautiful room in the Capitol as “senators only.” The Marble Room is a long, narrow, palatial space just outside the Senate Chamber, adjacent to a spacious balcony overlooking the National Mall. With its ceiling of veined Italian marble, walls of dark Tennessee marble, white marble Corinthian columns, and ornate mirrors that reflect a magnificent chandelier, the Marble Room is one of the Capitol’s most unique spaces.³²

The Marble Room had an interesting history long before it became the exclusive domain of senators. Union troops camped there during the Civil War. *Harper’s Magazine* noted that soldiers filled the elegant space with fitches of bacon, slices of which they “toasted on their jack-knives at roaring fires in the chimney-place.” Senate doorkeeper Isaac Bassett saw soldiers “bring arms full of bacon” and “throw them

down on the floor of the Marble Room.” He had to “caution them not to grease the marble walls.”³³

From the 1850s until 1921, the Marble Room served as a general meeting place, accessible to all, including reporters, lobbyists, constituents, and even protestors. “The Senate marble room was completely filled to-day by a delegation of ladies from the National Equal Suffrage Association,” reported the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* on January 28, 1896. The women gathered in the room “to present their plea for recognition at the ballot box.”

By the early 20th century, the Marble Room was a busy public lounge, so congested that senators were forced to retreat to the smaller cloakrooms near the Chamber for their private conversations. When a 1914 ban on smoking in the Senate Chamber forced smokers into those small, windowless cloakrooms—making them all but unbearable—it became clear that senators needed some private space as well as a little fresh air. Consequently, in 1921 the Senate designated the Marble Room, with its large windows and



Senators in the ornate Senate Marble Room, ca. 1959. U.S. Senate Historical Office.

other visitors found huge screens blocking the entrance to the room. “One cannot see over these screens for they are too tall and on either side there is nothing visible to the naked eye,” noted a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*. A most persistent visitor might peek under the screens, but even that only allowed a glimpse of “assorted shoes” moving back and forth. “Who among us all can identify the shoes of his favorite Senator?” asked a reporter. Senators enjoyed their quiet place to smoke, read home-state newspapers, take a nap on an oversized sofa, or just eat a light lunch. Coffee, tea, salads, and sandwiches were carted into the room each day. As the *Baltimore Sun* observed, “The tea parlors of the British lords . . . did not far outshine this service a la carte.”³⁵

comfortable balcony, as senators-only space. Even the senators’ wives were not allowed.³⁴

The creation of this private sanctum did not go unnoticed. “The new arrangement gives light and air to the resting senators,” reported the *New York Times*. “They look out on the terrace, smoke,” and “think no doubt, occasionally.” No longer would senators be pestered by the public. Instead, constituents, reporters, and

For decades, the Marble Room provided a handy retreat for senators. Louisiana’s Huey Long used its cozy nooks to prepare for filibusters. Quentin Burdick of North Dakota played cribbage there. Washington’s Warren Magnuson favored it for afternoon power naps. Today, the Marble Room is often empty, thanks to availability of expansive Senate offices and senators’ private hideaways, but it remains senators-only.

The Famous Five, then Seven, and now Nine

How would you define a great senator? Would you consider oratorical skills, legislative ability, or leadership qualities? Would you choose a peacemaker, or do you favor rebels and agitators? In the 1950s, a committee chaired by Massachusetts senator John Kennedy struggled to answer such questions in an effort to name “the famous five”

of Senate history—senators whose portraits now adorn the Senate Reception Room in the U.S. Capitol.

The committee itself could be termed a “famous five” of the 20th century. It included Richard Russell of Georgia, Mike Mansfield of Montana, John Bricker of Ohio, and New Hampshire’s Styles Bridges, in addition to Chairman Kennedy. They took their responsibility

very seriously. “In these [difficult] days when political . . . service is too often ridiculed or disdained,” Kennedy commented, “it is particularly desirable that we focus the nation’s attention upon the Senate . . . [and its] role in our Government.” The committee quickly discovered, however, that defining senatorial greatness was not an easy task. “These five Senators to be picked by our committee, subject to the review of the full Senate,” explained Kennedy, “are the only five to be so honored from the Senate’s first 168 years.”

To narrow the field of candidates, the committee surveyed 150 scholars who produced a short list of 65 senators they thought worthy of such distinction. Most agreed that legislative achievement should be part of any definition of senatorial greatness, but some

suggested recognizing what they termed “courageous negotiation.” What about senators who failed to pass legislation, but in failing paved the road for future success? Must a senator demonstrate national leadership, or widespread support among his or her colleagues? What about courage? As someone commented, one senator’s courage is another senator’s pigheadedness. To reach a decision, committee members decided to avoid the label “great” and instead chose five “outstanding” senators. Rather than legislative achievement, they identified senators whose acts of “statesmanship transcend[ed] party and state lines.” Finally, they specified that to qualify, a senator had to be dead.³⁶

On May 1, 1957, the committee announced its decision. Not surprisingly, the “great triumvirate” of



Senate Reception Room. U.S. Senate Photographic Studio image, courtesy Senate Curator’s Office.

the pre-Civil War Senate—Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and John C. Calhoun—made the cut. Kennedy was quick to point out, however, that these men were controversial and often unpopular figures in their own time. It was Calhoun who referred to Clay as an “imposter” and “a creator of wicked schemes.” Clay labeled Calhoun a “rigid fanatic” who was destined to “die a traitor or a madman.” And Webster? Many had harsh words for Webster! It took the test of time to prove the lasting influence of this trio of senators.³⁷

Filling the last two spaces proved particularly difficult. George Norris of Nebraska gained the most votes from scholars, but Nebraska senator Carl Curtis threatened a filibuster to block that choice. Instead,

the committee selected Robert La Follette of Wisconsin, whose famous 1917 defense of free speech during wartime nearly got him expelled from the Senate. They completed the set with the respected conservative Robert Taft of Ohio, whose premature death four years earlier had so saddened the Senate community.³⁸

The portraits were unveiled on March 12, 1959. Since that time, four more likenesses have been added—portraits of Robert Wagner of New York and Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan, and a lunette featuring Oliver Ellsworth and Roger Sherman of Connecticut. The collection is now referred to as the “Famous Nine,” but there is room for more. The Reception Room has three prominent spaces yet to be filled.³⁹

The Taft Memorial Bell Tower

A crowd of 5,000 people braved a morning chill in April 1959 to watch President Dwight D. Eisenhower dedicate a new memorial on Capitol Hill—a stately bell tower, or carillon, named in honor of Ohio senator Robert Taft.⁴⁰

Serving in the Senate from 1939 until his death in 1953, Robert Taft is best remembered for his role in passing the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947 (also known as the Labor Management Relations Act). An amendment to the 1935 National Labor Relations Act, the Taft-Hartley Act curtailed some labor union activities and required unions to provide fuller disclosure of financial and political activities. Taft became Republican floor leader in 1953 but fell victim to cancer within months of taking that office. In the wake of his death, the Senate awarded Taft two unique tributes: a place in the Senate’s “Famous Five” collection of portraits and a graceful memorial on Capitol Hill.⁴¹



Robert A. Taft Memorial and Carillon. Architect of the Capitol.



Robert A. Taft Memorial and Carillon. Architect of the Capitol.

In 1959, as the final touches were being added to the Taft memorial, a copper box was placed inside the cornerstone, a time capsule of Taft's career. Among the items included was a small alabaster elephant, a nod to the man known nationally as "Mr. Republican." At the dedication ceremony, Taft's family and colleagues joined President Eisenhower and former president Herbert Hoover to pay tribute to the departed statesman. Recalling a friendship that dated back to Taft's boyhood, the 85-year-old Hoover reflected on Taft's sense of duty and commitment to public service. "He believed in political parties as a foundation of our elective system," Hoover remarked. "But his mind soared above party." Following such heartfelt remarks, Vice President

Richard M. Nixon accepted the privately funded structure on behalf of the Senate.⁴²

Located in the park to the west of the Russell Senate Office Building, the memorial includes a 100-foot bell tower of Tennessee marble resting on a base 15 feet above ground level. A 10-foot bronze statue of Taft adorns the base. Incised in the marble are words paying tribute to "the honesty, indomitable courage and high principles of free government symbolized by his life." The tower's carillon includes 27 bronze bells. The six-ton central bell, nicknamed "Big Bob," strikes on the hour, while the smaller fixed bells chime on the quarter-hour. Each year, at 2:00 p.m. on the Fourth of July, the tower's bells ring out the Star Spangled Banner.⁴³

The Senate's Tradition of Naming Rooms and Spaces

On a summer day in 1964, workmen quietly and unofficially affixed a bronze plaque to the south wall of room S-211 in the Senate wing of the Capitol. Forever linking the room with Lyndon B. Johnson, then president of the United States, this simple ceremony began a Senate tradition that continues today.⁴⁴

Completed with the new Senate wing in the 1850s, S-211 was designed to hold the Senate Library but instead housed the Senate Post Office and then the Committee on the District of Columbia. For 73 years, this room served as a virtual D.C. town hall. When the new Dirksen Senate Office Building provided

space for the D.C. Committee in 1958, Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson seized the opportunity, took possession of the vacated S-211, declared it his new office, and ordered it redecorated. On January 7, 1959, Johnson entered a luxurious room adorned in royal greens and golds. In fact, it was so opulent that senators and reporters referred to it as the “Taj Mahal.” It also included the ultimate status symbol of the time—a private bathroom, installed in a wooden cabinet that stood in the corner of the room.⁴⁵

Johnson became vice president in 1961 and took over the Capitol’s vice-presidential office, but he did not relinquish S-211. Instead, he forced incoming



Lyndon B. Johnson Room. U.S. Senate Photographic Studio image, courtesy Senate Curator's Office.

leader Mike Mansfield into an office across the hall. Even if Johnson had ceded S-211, Mansfield might not have wanted it. “The suite . . . bears [Johnson’s] unmistakable stamp,” commented the *Washington Post*, and “a way out color . . . theme that makes the reserved Mansfield shudder.” When the vice presidency fell vacant with Johnson’s move to the presidency in 1963, control of S-211 reverted back to the Senate. Eventually, a renovation restored its 19th-century décor, but the room’s connection to Johnson persisted.⁴⁶

In 1976 the Senate added another room to its collection of honorary spaces. Named for Johnson’s successor, Senator Mike Mansfield of Montana, room



Mike Mansfield, by Aaron Shikler, 1978. U.S. Senate Collection.

S-207 is an elegant meeting space featuring panels of black walnut with a mantel of white Vermont marble. Created as part of an east front extension to the Capitol built between 1958 and 1962, the room has provided the setting for numerous events ranging from party caucus luncheons and ad hoc legislative meetings to wedding receptions and even sleeping quarters for tired senators during all-night filibusters.⁴⁷

Quietly understated in comparison to the more ornate Lyndon B. Johnson Room, the Mansfield Room reflects the man it honors. During some of the nation’s darkest days of the 1960s and 1970s—assassinations, war, protests—Mansfield brought calm to the heated Capitol Hill atmosphere. He gave the Senate “an example of steadfastness,” recalled Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia. Mike Mansfield “is more quiet and more laconic than many legislative leaders,” noted Iowa senator John Culver, but his “acts of quiet persuasion have yielded steady results.”⁴⁸

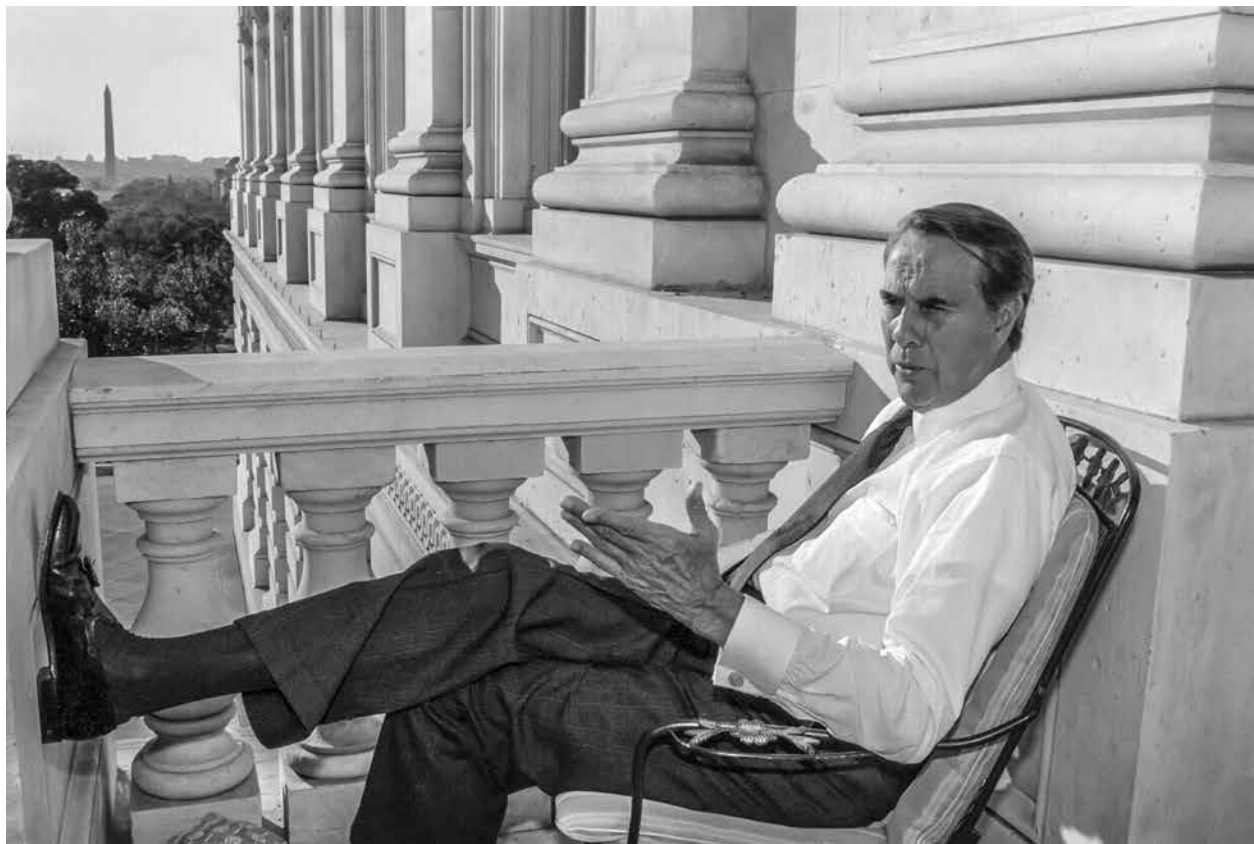
Dominating the room is one of the Senate’s most admired portraits. When Mansfield retired in January of 1977, he had no interest in sitting for a portrait. “When I’m gone,” he said, “I want to be forgotten.” The Senate persevered, however, and in 1978 gained a painting by Aaron Shikler, which hangs in the room today. Shikler captured the reserved dignity of the man, assuring that Mansfield—despite his wishes—will never be forgotten.⁴⁹

By the 1980s, efforts were underway to name additional spaces in a bipartisan way. In 1981 Senate Resolution 80 made the designation of S-211 as the Lyndon B. Johnson Room official and also named rooms to honor John F. Kennedy and three Republican senators—Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, Styles Bridges of New Hampshire, and Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan. Not everyone was pleased. “We are naming rooms at a rapid rate,” Rhode Island senator John Chafee complained. “There was a lot of talent [in the Senate] before 1950 . . . and there will be a lot of talent

after 1980. . . . If we really want to save rooms for the great giants of this body, I would hope that we would not use them all up.”⁵⁰

When Kansas senator Robert Dole left the Senate in 1996, most of the major rooms were taken. To honor the outgoing leader with an appropriately named space, the Senate chose a balcony commonly known as “the Dole beach.” Throughout his years as Republican leader, Dole had used the balcony for meetings, strategy sessions, and casual conversation. Dole graciously

accepted the honor, then quipped: “I thought I was going to get the whole building!” More recently, rooms have been named to honor two pioneering and influential senators, Margaret Chase Smith of Maine and Barbara Mikulski of Maryland, the first women to be so honored by the Senate. Today, the Senate wing of the Capitol includes a multitude of commemorative spaces, ranging from large opulent rooms to small old-fashioned phone booths—each a reminder of dedicated service to the United States Senate.⁵¹



Senator Robert Dole on “Dole Beach,” the balcony near his leadership office, 1990. Library of Congress.



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BETTY K. KOED is the U.S. Senate Historian and Director of the Senate Historical Office. Koed earned a Ph.D. in political and public history at the University of California, Santa Barbara, before joining the Historical Office in 1998. In 2016 Koed was awarded that university's Distinguished Alumni Award. As Senate Historian, Koed supervises all historical and archival projects, provides talks and presentations to senators, staff, scholars, and the public on wide-ranging topics of Senate history, and conducts oral history interviews with former senators and staff. She oversees more than 10,000 pages of historical material on the Senate website, is senior editor of the *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress*, and provides research and reference assistance to the Senate community, the public, and the media.



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